The Post-colonial Christ Paradox:

Literary Transfigurations of a Trickster God

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Abstract

Within English post-colonial literary studies, Christianity has often been characterized as principally a colonial imposition and, therefore, only modestly theorized as a post-colonial religion that lends itself to complex post-colonial literary renderings. However, the literary implications of post-colonial Christianity will demand increasing attention as Christianity, according to demographic trends, will over the course of the twenty-first century be practiced more widely by peoples who fall under the rubric of post-colonial studies than by peoples of European ancestry. My dissertation considers how four texts—Thomas King's 1993 novel, *Green Grass Running Water*, Derek Walcott's 1967 play, *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Arundhati Roy's 1996 novel, *The God of Small Things*, and Chigozie Obioma's 2015 novel, *The Fishermen*—feature Christ-like figures whose post-colonial significance resides in the classical Christological paradoxes with which each is identified. Critically, each of these texts pairs Christological paradoxes with paradoxes associated with pre-colonial trickster figures or trickster spirituality. In imagining the Christ as a paradoxical, post-colonial trickster, my core texts address ambiguities and anxieties attending post-colonial pursuits of empowerment. The mixture of Christological and trickster paradoxes in these texts questions post-colonial understandings of power that remain constrained within a colonially-reinforced imaginary inclined to recognize power chiefly as an exercise in subjugation. Because Christology remains central to Christian understandings of personhood, these texts' probing of post-colonial empowerment also remains deeply invested in their explorations of what post-colonial personhood can mean in the wake of dehumanizing colonialism. My core texts bear witness to diverse histories of English colonialism, the unevenness of their attendant Christianizing agendas and the particular, contextual post-colonial currency of the Christological and trickster paradoxes invoked. My dissertation posits that the ambiguity generated by these paradoxes, far from inhibiting ethical action, catalyzes inclusiveness by troubling lingering, colonially established or reinforced hierarchies premised on rigid stratification. In so doing, my dissertation also demonstrates how post-colonial literary Christologies—in my case, those with trickster intonations—can merit extended literary and theological study.

For Jessica.

Who has faith.

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<u>**Foreword:**</u>

<u>**Post-Colonial Literary Christology**</u>

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1. Introduction

Step into the water on the beach at Thiruvananthapuram, on the southern-most tip of India, and you step into the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean all at once. Stepping into the triune confluence of these great bodies of water, into the "The Three at Once, the Once in Three" (Kipling 1), stresses the remarkable artifice of graphing rigid borders between fluid waterscapes. Here, cartography demands an imagination savvy enough to envision static lines drawn over shifting surfaces. It helps to be reminded of the historical gravity of these borders (Hunter 6; Gupta 37; M. K. Roy 1), as well as the ecological distinctions of the waterscapes they name (Vinayachandran and Kurian 1), but as the ocean, sea, and bay at Thiruvananthapuram converge, borders con-fuse, serving less as instruments of containment than as arenas of transformation, exchange, and liminality. Here, waterscapes do not stop when they meet each other, they *become* each other. Navigating these porous borders, graphed over morphing geographies, can prove to be riddlingly tricky.

My dissertation represents a point of similar confluence, of the disciplinary and discursive variety, between post-colonial studies, literary studies, and Christology. This confluence hardly effaces, let alone collapses, the distinctiveness of these great bodies of scholarship; indeed, I can appreciate the wisdom in grounding my dissertation on the rock of solid disciplinary precedent rather than on the beach where I must weather critiques from three disciplinary traditions. Nevertheless, as my next chapter notes, these traditions already enjoy a fecund history of scholarly reciprocity which gives my house on the sand a more rooted foundation than might initially appear. More importantly, when in the eye of this

sometimes-stormy disciplinary confluence, one might encounter a mysteriously familiar figure embodying paradoxes, one whose counter-intuitive behaviour tests one's hermeneutic assumptions. The figure may be defiantly snoozing through the tempest, or calmly strolling over the surface of the deep, or something equally scandalous, transgressing expectations with the flair of a masterful trickster. From these unsettling encounters, this dissertation develops a "post-colonial literary Christology"; that is, a reading strategy focused on the paradoxical purposes of Christological tricksters in English-language post-colonial literature.

The central labour in this dissertation involves blending key post-colonial, Christological and literary concerns that congregate within expositions of tricksters in the following four texts: Thomas King's 1993 novel, *Green Grass Running Water*, Derek Walcott's 1967 play, *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Arundhati Roy's 1996 novel, *The God of Small Things*, and Chigozie Obioma's 2015 novel, *The Fishermen*. These core texts emerge from four post-colonial contexts distinguished by historically variant colonial approaches to governance, including varying postures towards attendant "Christianizing" agendas, apprehensions, and affects. These four approaches, porously categorized, are settler colonialism, plantation colonialism, proxy colonialism, and veranda colonialism. Settler colonialism, as in North America, appropriated already populated land, killed or evicted its residents, and repopulated those regions with colonial Christians and their heirs. Plantation colonialism, as in the Caribbean, witnessed a resident colonial minority overseeing the majority of the population whom they had enslaved or indentured. Proxy colonialism, as in India, depended on indigenous middlemen to execute colonial initiatives. Veranda colonialism evinced across varied British ambitions in Africa, concentrated colonial presence within or around mission stations and settlements, transforming missionizing initiatives into networked nodes of imperial impingement. Before continuing, it is critical to caution that these colonial strategies, far from being exclusive to a particular colonial region or period, could be particularly pronounced within differing colonial theatres—as is suggested by the figuration of tricksters in my four core literary texts. These core texts elicit post-colonial trickster and Christological paradoxes that bespeak anxieties enmeshed in the variations of colonialism from which their narratives seek sovereignty.

Although the heart of each chapter lies in its literary exposition, each chapter draws on somewhat varied disciplinary priorities and strategies to explore the colonial provenance and post-colonial possibilities embedded in the Christological tricksters it engages.

2. Chapter Outlines

My "Introduction" sets the groundwork for my exposition by defending why the religion of conquering colonizers demands continued and critical study in post-colonial contexts. Beyond the historical impact of introducing, adapting, or enforcing variations of eighteenth and nineteenth century Christian mythos on colonized peoples, the striking growth of post-colonial Christian populations has generated major post-colonial *and* major Christian movements. From there, I proceed to highlight some key differences and semblances between theological and literary Christology, aiming to clarify how theological exegeses can critically shape my literary expositions. I then begin qualifying what "paradox" suggests within the purview of my study before I survey the centrality and vitality of the Christ paradox within diverse Christian traditions.

My goal in the "Introduction" is to share enough evidence, from a sufficiently robust and diverse sample of Christian thinkers, to demonstrate that despite the distant histories, diverse cultural codes, divergent philosophies, and fractious politics that have divided Christian movements over the past two thousand years, the insistence on paradox as a cornerstone of Christology has provided a very heterogeneous body of co-religionists with a shared theological preoccupation.[1] The impetus for this preoccupation across broad traditions of Christian thought is soteriological, emerging from the insistence that the Christ's salvific mission significantly hinges on the Christ's paradoxical identity—even though Christian traditions have differed on what "salvation" entails, why the Christ's identity must be paradoxical to ensure it, or how paradox should be properly understood and described.

These ambiguities are crucial to my next contention and exegetic premise advanced in my "Introduction": Christological paradoxes are, at their crux, hermeneutic issues, and the history of Christology is largely an operose study in *de facto* hermeneutic pluralism. I will begin clarifying the

importance of the relationship between hermeneutic pluralism and post-colonialism as I begin to clarify what I posit as my post-colonial "fields" in terms of geographies, histories, and theoretical orientations. This clarification will involve detailing some of the key discursive tools, engineered or employed by post-colonial theorists and their post-structuralist/post-modern interlocutors, which I will adopt and adapt to help communicate the pertinency of Christology to post-colonial literary thought. Shaping a post-colonial literary Christology—as written into tricksters—entails studying the mythic contingency between "paradoxical identity" and the possibilities of "post-colonial salvation" which can be evinced in the literary texts this dissertation considers. The introductory chapter concludes by exploring a nearly global trope in which these mythic contingencies can be evocatively encountered: the trickster figure. The post-colonial literary texts considered in this dissertation challenge us with a "trickster Christ"—not necessarily a *false* or an *anti*-Christ—who embodies the paradoxical harmonization of dissonant identities within narratives of post-colonial cunning and hope. The trickster figure, as this section of the chapter will clarify, cannot be casually characterized, for the trickster is a thoroughly paradoxical and slippery figure: an anti-hero, perhaps, but commonly so to expose sham heroes and their misled worshippers; an agent of chaos, sometimes, but repressive notions of order can be cathartically worthy targets; a troublemaker, usually, but with an enviably crafty ability to short-circuit discourses of power; a victimizer, yes, but also a victim who demonstrates that maybe those labels depend on whose side you're on, when you're on them, and who gets to decide the dividing lines.

Tricksters, it should be noted, make me nervous. If they are doing their job, they should make you nervous, too. Because tricksters are not easily reduced to being discussed safely as literary figures: tricksters are ancient and dangerous, and should be respected as such. Tricksters are disruptive, liable to do things like—interrupt sentences mid-way, and that's just what you get for dealing with a "tricky, sick trickster, mister, tongue-twister, off the scale, Richter, freedom dream fighter" (Fernandez). Engaging tricksters risks inviting them into our imaginations, where they may well make a grand mess of things. Indeed, even aspiring to being a square-shooting scholar when dealing with a trickster remains difficult, for how do you outfox a double-dealing paradox? And with that caution, let us begin considering these

post-colonial literary trickster Christs, cowing power with stylized guile, these mocked and mocking dark-skinned Christs, these sweet-and-salty-talking third-world Christs, these ones wondering what does it profit a people to save their souls but lose their earth?

The first of my four core chapters explores post-colonial paradoxes ensuing from on-going settler colonialism, as engaged in the 1993 novel, *Green Grass Running Water* by Thomas King. Born in 1943 to parents of Cherokee, Greek, and German descent, King was raised in Northern California and has spent most of his adult life in Canada where his work has garnered significant critical plaudits. King's 1990 novel, *Medicine River*, won the Writer's Guild of Alberta Best Novel Award and the Josephine Miles Award/Oakland Pen Award. In 1992, King's children story, *Coyote Columbus Story*, was nominated for a Governor General's Award, as was *Green Grass Running Water* in 1993. King's public profile increased, as likely did the popularity of *Green Grass Running Water*, when one of the central settings in the novel, the Dead Dog Cafe, inspired King's 1996-2001 CBC series, "The Dead Dog Cafe Comedy Hour." In 2004, *Green Grass Running Water* was the runner up for the CBC Radio's popular, annual "competition"—*Canada Reads*—in which it was nominated and promoted not by fellow literary figures, as was then typical, but by a Canadian politician (Glen Murray, then mayor of Winnipeg). King remains a highly recognized writer in Canada—his most recent novel, *The Back of the Turtle*, won the 2014 Governor General's Award—and *Green Grass Running Water* remains a cardinal star in his constellation of work.

The central Christological paradox I explore in *Green Grass Running Water* engages the trickster Christ as both stranger and friend. Most critical readings of *Green Grass Running Water* struggle to recognize the novel's literary transfiguration of the Christ myth beyond its satirization of Jesus as a mouthy herald of colonization, a hostile-if-bumbling stranger. In some contrast, my reading of *Green Grass Running Water*—in prioritizing the expository emphases of a post-colonial, literary trickster Christology—demonstrates how *Green Grass Running Water* cunningly integrates salient signifiers of the Christ paradox when characterizing and narrating its cast of indigenous tricksters. The Christ myth in *Green Grass Running Water* is not confined to a satire; it more broadly saturates a narrative in which the

encroachments of settler colonialism are hardly a settled issue: as the novel attests, commitments to and jurisdiction over treaty rights still remain painfully contested in Canada, often raising and sustaining paradoxes of colonial governance not only over indigenous people, but over the very definition of indigenous personhood itself. Drawing on the theological veneration of laughter across many indigenous traditions, as well as King's ascription of trickster affinities to the Christ myth, my reading suggests *Green Grass Running Water* presents a more complex and hospitable literary transfiguration of the Christ myth, one that allows King's novel to personify trickster-like paradoxes of identity and empowerment struggling against a continuing history of land encroachment. My reading of *Green Grass Running Water* also introduces, by way of demonstration, key ideas developed in my subsequent chapters. King's novel bespeaks trickster-doctored possibilities of levelling criticism without reifying colonial boundaries, of invoking paradoxes that complicate without confuting the criticisms levelled, and of recognizing Christological paradoxes camouflaged unless spectacled through particular post-colonial hermeneutic contexts.

My second core chapter explores post-colonial paradoxes ensuing from plantation colonialism, as engaged in the 1967 play, *The Dream on Monkey Mountain* by Derek Walcott. Born in St. Lucia in 1930, Walcott's poetry—from his 1962 collection, *In a Green Night: Poems 1948-1960,* to his 1990 epic *Omeros*, and beyond—has garnered more attention and accolades than have his plays. Besides winning specific awards for his verse, including the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 1988, Walcott's accolades have tended to emphasize his accomplishments as a poet: Walcott won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992 for "a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment" ("The Nobel Prize, 1992"); Hilton Als's eulogic column in *The New Yorker* devoted about 40 words out of 1749 to mention Walcott was "also" a playwright ("A Mighty Poet Has Died"). *Dream,* however, did win a New York based Obie Award in 1971 for "Best Foreign Play" and remains Walcott's best-known play among his body of nearly 80 scripts (Campbell) typically characterized by the local lyricism of their dialogue and their license with the cultural pluralism of dramaturgical conventions, evoking the abstract sensibility of a performed free-verse poem. Walcott's commitment to theatre,

however, followed him from his co-founding of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1950 across a series of prestigious academic postings in Canada, England, and the United States, where in 1981 he founded the Boston Playwrights' Theatre, regularly staged work in New York and London, and learned to anticipate questions such as, "Is this the first time you have ever done a play?" (Campbell).

The central Christological paradox I explore in *Dream* engages the trickster Christ as both "lion" and "lamb." *Dream* invokes these fabulist titles for the Christ myth, interchanging them with fabulist trickster figures rooted in Caribbean folk culture, as it dramatizes its post-colonial critique and transfiguration of colonial-era Christological invocations and subaltern trickster tactics. Specifically, *Dream* upbraids post-colonial movements, marked by plantation origins and Christian inflections, attempting earnestly or exploitatively to harvest soteriological hopes, planted generations ago, of returning to Africa. The Christology of these movements severs the lion from its lamb paradox, expecting messianic hope to reveal itself in the zeal of an apex predator promising deliverance from a dehumanizing history. *Dream*, however, reroutes messianic hopes for an unequivocal recognition of personhood—obfuscated by violently internalized colonial self-hatred—away from mythic migrations to Africa and towards local roots of identity, roots that remain resiliently fertile with possibility despite being tilled from a history salinized with the blood of the suffering and the slaughtered. Written in Trinidad only a few years after the nation had won its independence in 1962, *Dream* envisions post-colonial personhood catalyzed and complicated by prying off colonial masks, encouraging a process of reciprocated recognition akin to how the Christological lion and lamb paradoxically recognize themselves in the other's otherness.

My third core chapter explores post-colonial paradoxes fashioned from proxy colonialism, as engaged in the 1996 novel, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhathi Roy, which won the 1997 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Born in Kerala, India, to a high-caste Syrian Orthodox family who shares a kin *jati*[2] with the characters in her novel, Roy's *The God of Small Things* was her only notable work of fiction until *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* was published in 2017. Between this twenty-year gap in publishing fiction, Roy has published over a dozen collections of essays chiefly critiquing India's

domestic politics within the purview of post-colonial globalization. Roy's essays showcase a knack for sardonic word play, complex political sympathies, and disgust with strains of injustice abundantly encountered in *The God of Small Things*. Unlike Roy's essays, however, Roy's novel does not direct and press readers towards a compelling conclusion. Rather, *The God of Small Things'* scathing critique of Roy's *jati* (and their lower-caste collaborators) foregroundss the volatile paradoxes of privileges and predicaments inherited through a lineage haunted by the anxieties of colonial middlemen, the proxy administrators of British imperial ambitions, tricksters straddling the worlds of the colonized and their colonizers. Because Roy's central characters have been Christians for as long as the English, *The God of Small Things* muddies Manichean clarity that pits colonizing Christians against colonized heathens, bespeaks the cruel ironies of "providential" imperialism, and revives the paradox shunted in the God of the biggest empire in history by Christologically pairing it with the God of much smaller things.

The central Christological paradox I explore in *The God of Small Things* engages the trickster Christ as both transcendent ("heavenly") and immanent (or incarnate). The pre-colonial trickster trope Roy enmeshes with her Christ figuration is inspired by a soteriologically Christological trick of Orthodox provenance: salvation as *theosis* (becoming Christ-like, or "deification"). Theosis paradoxically blurs boundaries of identification, which for Roy's central characters, riddled with anxieties embedded in their already ambiguated identities, can represent an anathema inviting violent redress. The unusual and tricky literary locus of this theosis—the transcendent persona of the anonymous, omniscient, third-person narrator—entangles the "big" perspective of the narrator with the personhood of the novel's "small" characters. Against her central characters' conflicted post-colonial desires to disambiguate identity, *The God of Small Things* proffers a model of salvation premised on the paradoxes of cosmologic ambiguation. Furthermore, Roy's evocation of theosis critiques a history of aggressive (and often successful) proselytizing by European Roman Catholics and Protestants that has rendered the post-colonial tenets of Orthodoxy in Kerala sometimes difficult to distinguish from kin doctrines propagated by competing congregations (Roman Catholic or Protestant) drawn from shared caste groups. Set in a post-colonial Christian community still struggling with ambiguations of its identity and caste prejudices central to its

orthopraxy, Roy's novel slyly advances Christological paradoxes of identification, personification, and transfiguring communion critical to a soteriological Christology of Orthodoxy.

My final core chapter explores post-colonial paradoxes fomented by veranda colonialism, as engaged in the 2015 novel, *The Fishermen* by Chigozie Obioma. Born in 1986 in Akure, the southwestern Nigerian town in which *The Fishermen* is set, Obioma has been praised by the New York Times as "truly…the heir to Chinua Achebe" (Rocco). *The Fishermen* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and included among "best books of the year lists" by *The Economist*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Financial Times* ("Shelf Life"; "WSJ's Best Books of 2015"; Kite). Narrating familial turbulence mirroring the political turbulence of the 1990s, *The Fishermen* critiques contemporary, charismatic-leaning Nigerian Christologies (and by implication their kin Pan-African variations) for appropriating, instead of transfiguring, colonial models of a singularly conquering Christ. Colonial "veranda Christianity" refers to a model of missionizing typified by the concentration of "worldly" colonial offices and administration within or nearby a mission station, making the station's veranda a principal mission field (Jenkins 47; Hastings 211, 215). *The Fishermen* bears bitter witness to the Christological legacy of old coalitions between church offices and colonial governments. Although *The Fishermen*'s vivid illustration of its Christian milieu bespeaks storied African efforts to envision the Christ myth outside its missionary moorings, the novel critiques Nigerian post-colonial Christology for propagating a Christ bearing promises unsettlingly similar to promises tendered on a veranda by Christian colonizers: prosperity and protection. This Christ is a Christ promising empowerment, material and mystical, estranged from the paradoxes of Christological suffering. This Christ is a Christ incapable of engaging the difficult paradoxes of theodicy, let alone the complexities of post-colonial pain. *The Fishermen* rehabilitates the paradoxes of the Christ myth, scandalously, by coalescing its characterizations of its Christ figure with its characterization of an indigenous trickster demonized, across generations of Nigerian Christianity, as Satan. *The Fishermen*, written by the only practicing Christian to author one of the four core texts in my study (Smith C., "The Two Worlds of a Nigerian Christian Novelist"), presents a

literary meditation on the Christ paradox that imagines possibilities of post-colonial hope outside singular pursuits of securing empowerment.

The central Christological paradox I explore in *The Fishermen* engages the trickster Christ as both *Christus Victor* (the Christ of victory) and *Christus Dolor* (the Christ of suffering). Soteriologically, *Christus Victor* Christologies in African contexts—colonial and post-colonial—have prioritized realizing the fruits of salvation practically in the here-and-now alongside (if not over) the fate of the "soul" in the afterlife. As *The Fishermen* demonstrates, African *Christus Victor* Christologies, in emphasizing the everyday dynamics of soteriology (rather than ghettoizing salvation to the sweet hereafter), can contribute much to global post-colonial thought regarding the range of soteriological emphases possible within the rubric of "orthodox" Christological formulations. But as *The Fishermen* also cautions, the consequences of muting the *Christus Dolor* paradox enjoined to the *Christus Victor* enfeebles the Christ myth, flattens its complexity, and reduces it to a totem of power servicing ambitions often laced with tenacious and violent colonial inclinations. The Christ paradox, which *The Fishermen* composes to scandalize Nigerian Christian sensibilities too comfortable with a one-sided Christ myth, inserts ambiguity into the pursuit and exercise of power. The regal, conquering Christ celebrated in a *Christus Victor* severed from a *Christus Dolor* conflates empowerment with Providence, which may seem like an entirely honourable post-colonial construct until, as *The Fishermen* laments, we realize this conflation remains deeply steeped in the logic of missionaries who argued the expanse of the British Empire was evidence of God's favour. In contrast, *The Fishermen* novelizes a trickster Christology that tests the colonial narrowness of post-colonial ambitions, inviting a difficult and stirringly uncertain reflection regarding the currency of the *Christus Dolor* for those already too familiar with suffering.

Chapter One

Introduction: Paradoxes of Post-Colonial Christianity, Christology and The Trickster

1. Introduction: Why Is Post-Colonial Christology Worth Our Attention?

Post-colonial literature that invokes the Christ paradox needs to be taken seriously, in part, because Christianity is well on its way to becoming primarily identified as a religion of the post-colonies. According to Philip Jenkins, contemporary global Christianity includes almost two billion people from culturally diverse and geographically disparate communities. No single cultural, ethnic, national, linguistic, or even continental community of Christians is large enough to claim it enjoys a demographic majority within the global Christian communion. Having said that, the largest geographic concentration of Christians remains located in Europe (about 560 million adherents) who, along with North America's 260 million adherents, represent the wealthiest block of contemporary Christianity (Jenkins 2). Significant and influential as these Western/Northern Christians are, they nevertheless constitute less than half the number of Christians in the world alive today, and their numbers are shrinking, fast. If current trends continue, and Jenkins provides persuasive reasons why they will, Christianity is going south. Within the next fifty years, the continental heartland of Christianity will soon be Africa and South America, but even outside that heartland, nations such as the Philippines will have almost three times the number of Christians as Germany will (Jenkins 90). The only Western nation in which a demographic majority of the population will identify as Christian will be the United States, but that's largely because the U.S., due to its immigration and internal demographic growth patterns, is itself becoming less "white" (Jenkins 100). Because Christianity entered the third-world largely through colonialism, this tectonic shift in Christian residence demands the attention of students of Christianity and students of post-colonial literature.

My dissertation draws on R.S. Sugirtharajah's definition of post-colonial studies, in *Post-colonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, as "a way of engaging with the textual, historical, and cultural articulations of societies disturbed and transformed by the historical reality of the colonial presence" (*Post-Colonial Criticism* 11). The particular strains of global Christian expansion and transformation this research engages considers those which were advanced and accelerated by British imperialism, which at its lowest point (or "highest" point, depending on your politics) stretched Britain's empire over two-thirds of the world. Circumstantiating colonialism's designs and enumerating its repercussions in a manner that inclusively addresses the varieties of colonial violence would require an exhaustive, macabre exercise in social history beyond the threshold of this project. Instead, I follow a familiar method in post-colonial studies of portraying the "whole" of colonialism by selecting colonial moments that faithfully serve, for the purposes of the given argument, as its synecdoches.[3]

Consider four colonial techniques of subjugation, each one serving as a synecdoche of the "colonial" against which the "post" in "post-colonial" strives—and to which it yet remains inextricably linked. Mike Davis meticulously details how politically engineered famines were principle instruments of Victorian imperialism in Asia and Africa, estimating the number of people who were starved to death under Victorian imperial rule well exceeds 30 million (7). "What seemed from a metropolitan perspective the nineteenth century's final blaze of imperial glory was," according to Davis, "from an Asian or African viewpoint, only the hideous light of giant funeral pyre" (7). Winston Churchill, when faced with the consequences of the last British-administered famine in India (between 1943-1944, when India's economic output was pillaged to support the Allied war effort) dismissed the deaths of millions in India as inconsequential because, in his words, Indians "breed like rabbits" anyway (Sen 106). In a North American context, Jeffrey Amherst distinguished himself as a colonial hero in the mid-eighteenth century by distributing blankets intentionally infected with smallpox to the nations of the Ohio River. Amherst's strategy, which may have "killed perhaps 100 000" in "months" (Churchill 56), was considered ingenious enough to have towns named after him in England and Upper Canada. British imperialists had certainly attempted less efficient methods of genocide: on the other side of the planet, one Aborigine survivor of

the British conquest of Tasmania in the early 1800s witnessed how their civilizing conquerors "buried our babies with only their heads above the ground. All in a row they were. They had a test to see who could kick the babies' heads off the furthest" (Pilger 580; see also Spencer 67). The successes secured through spreading famine, disease, and decapitating infants for sport notwithstanding, T.E. Lawrence argued in the 1920s that the British response to the so-called "Arab uprising" should be a more final solution:

> There is a preliminary Arab success, the British reinforcements go out as a punitive force. They fight their way…their objective, which is meanwhile bombarded by artillery, aeroplanes, or gunboats. Finally perhaps a village is burnt and the district pacified. *It is odd that we don't use poison gas on these occasions. Bombing the houses is a patchy way of getting the women and children…By gas attacks the whole population of offending districts could be wiped out neatly, and as a method of government would be no more immoral than the present system.* (Lawrence 311, emphasis mine)

Perhaps I pick these examples because for many Canadians these monumentalized figures connote a harmlessness that by sheer force of contrast ironically heightens the butchery they shroud: "Victoria Day" is a national May holiday that mercifully ushers in early summer, Amherst is a picturesque island-based Ontario locale, and T.E. Lawrence is blue-eyed Peter O'Toole.[4] "The countless tales of colonial brutality are too important to be lightly or prematurely disposed of," cautions commonwealth cousin and cultural critic Paul Gilroy, "because a sanitized history of the imperial project is required by those who wish to bring it back to life" (48). Yet when one considers the volume of slaughter explicitly sanctioned under these colonizers' offices or counsel, we must question how relationships between colonizers and their colonized, even when they took on more nuanced and complex forms of engagement, remained haunted by the mass death intentionally inflicted on the latter by the former—and, indeed, the fact that members of the latter had survived to enjoy any kind of engagement with the former at all. Much distinguished the colonized from their colonizers—language, material culture, religion, "race"—but where one stood on the spectrum between colonizer and colonized might be equated with one's odds of surviving or thriving

within colonial settings riddled with a lust for loot and labour, settings menaced by the constant memory and presence of grand-scale, politically sanctioned murder.

Many commentators refer to Christianity as "the handmaiden of imperialism" (Kawashima 54), which is a nice way of saying it was a valued mistress for mass killers and thieves. More delicately (but no less truthfully) put, this handmaiden imagery suggests that Christian thinkers, and especially missionaries, navigated relationships with other agents of empire— colonial governments, armies, merchants, and settlers, to name some key ones, that could be as exploitative as they were intimate. Although the exact place of missionaries within this rogues gallery of colonial agents remains difficult to fix (Porter, "Introduction" 1–3), we know it was common for missionaries to self-identify as emissaries of imperialism (Dube 4), that missionaries were not above traveling on ships named "Jesus" carrying slaves—or in the case of Baptists, carrying gin (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 288)—and that missionary support in the nineteenth century thrived on lurid tales of "heathen" blindness and the savage cruelties of idolatry. . .[which were] notoriously prone to gross and offensive caricatures of the heathen" (Stanley 449).

Towards these efforts, by the turn of the twentieth century "the British missionary movement was a truly imposing undertaking involving over nine thousand female and male missionaries, sixty missionary societies, and roughly £2 million annually. . . The largest society, the CMS [Christian Missionary Society], alone distributed 2.5 million magazines and 5 million papers and tracts in 1899" (Maughan 34). Hardly surprising, then, that we do not have to look very hard to discover a particular post-colonial verve reserved to censure missionaries who attempted to give imperialism "moral and spiritual legitimacy" (Maughn 34). As the Rev. James Johnston put it, in his1888 *Report of the Centenary Conference of Protestant Mission of the World;* "It is to the race which is sending the blessings of Christianity to the heathen to which God is giving success as the colonizers and conquerors of the world" (xvi). The tainted jingoism of such sentiments notwithstanding, colonizing Christianity was not homogenous movement, either in its particular formulations of "race," moral and spiritual legitimacy, or function in different colonial locales. Subsequent chapters will detail these differences as needed, but for

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now let us keep in mind that the way Christian thought had embedded itself into the administration of Caribbean colonies, where the parish by the early eighteenth century had become "the basic unit of ecclesiastical and civil administration" (Hunte 87), would have been impossible in India where English missionaries such as William Carey began proselytizing India during the early nineteenth century despite the reproach of the East India Company, raising demands from London "for the recall of all missionaries and an end to the circulation of missionary translations, as the only way of protecting Britain's position in India," and the "general determination to prevent missionary activity [which] suggested that official policy supported Christianization" (Porter, *Religion versus Empire?* 69–70).[5] These missionizing efforts also stand in contrast to the "veranda Christianity" more common in Africa, where missionaries set up monastery-like stations that offered Eurocentric education, employment in the service of colonial expansion, and potential protection from the expansion of competing colonizers (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 207). And in settler colonies, "Christianization" owed little to missionaries—in North America they produced more texts than converts (Stevens 3)—when compared to indigenous realpolitik responses to repeated population displacements and decimations. Colonial Christianity was not deployed—and therefore not preached, practiced, or theorized—quite in the same way in different colonial theatres.

For many missionaries, nevertheless, English culture (and more broadly, European culture) was the natural expression of Christianity, which meant that converts to Christianity should naturally become more English—in speech, dress, customs, and manners.[6] "Civilization is to the Christian religion," wrote missionary John Philip in 1833, "what the body is to the soul" (Ross 217). This belief was certainly popular among missionaries, but it was hardly universal. In 1823, missionaries in Jamaica were instructing slaves to plant English rose bushes (Renk 33), because cultivating English flora in Jamaican soil apparently aided cultivating English religion in Jamaican souls, but these missionary efforts should not diminish how a mere fifteen years later, as Jon Sensbach details, "following the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies in 1838, the popularity of English dissenting missionaries, many of whom had strongly supported the abolitionist cause, remained high" (437). Mohandas Gandhi recounts

that while in South Africa, the missionaries that often confronted him with blunt chauvinism towards his Hindu faith were also those who stood up for him when he faced South Africa's segregationist indignities (*An Autobiography: Or The Story of my Experiments With Truth*). Indeed, Gandhi's official biographer, C.F. Andrews, was a missionary and remained Gandhi's close friend in South Africa and India. The efforts of David Livingstone, perhaps the most well-known Victorian missionary in Africa, demonstrated shifting sympathies with colonial causes. Livingstone built a career on propagating the troika of Christianity, civilization, and commerce, initially arguing, "commerce has such a good effect on their minds, for when they see such examples of our superiority they readily admit that the Bible has something in it" (Livingstone 310) . Livingstone would later fight the British government for Zulu rights (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 286).

Fictions of European superiority lost their credibility after World War I, during which the most "civilized" Christian nations of the world engaged in prolonged, industrialized, white-on-white tribal warfare. Colonizing Christians could hardly point to the superiority of their civilization as proof of Christianity's merits.[7] A range of thinkers from Hannah Arendt (137) to Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth* 101) to Mohandas Gandhi ("The Jews") have posited that World War II—its violence, its fascism—was imperial brutality returning to its centre (see also Fitzpatrick). When confronted by non-European, pre-Christian cultures, missionaries' attitudes—which ranged from Romanticization, to suspicion, to naked contempt—reflected European Christianity's deep ambivalence regarding its own pre-Christian history. Although European Christianity had for centuries been openly inspired by classical Greek philosophy and features of Europe's pagan past, it remained riddled with bitter anxieties about its obvious Jewish roots. The Holocaust, which took place in the heart of Christian Europe, represents a monstrous manifestation of these anxieties. The Christianity that missionaries exported came loaded with contentious debates, many long-stirring within European Christian thought, regarding how Christians should evaluate and engage the plurality of human cultures and histories inside and outside their ranks. Why Christianity would enter the colonies so ignobly, yet continue to grow and merit serious attention in the post-colonies, remains a riddle with which several post-colonial scholars grapple. Complex features of

this colonial "disturbance and transformation" are often embodied within literary Christ figures because their colonial affiliations and post-colonial appropriations very effectively enable them to disinter contradictions buried within the toxic logic of colonial hegemony—a hegemony which "would not have lasted a week without . . . collaborators among the colonized people" (Rushdie 8), and one which post-colonial sovereignty yet remains too delimited to excise.

2.   Mechanisms of Christological Paradox

Christological paradoxes emerge from tensions generated when Christians coherently try to answer, who is Jesus of Nazareth?[8] Early and influential Christological formulations were often liturgical—musical, communal, participatory—and liturgies continue to serve as vital sites of Christological engagement (Spinks; Daneel 170; Lock, "Carnival and Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology." 71; Harmless 147). In terms of Christian praxis, every Christian is a "lay" Christologist insofar as their answer to that central question— who is Jesus?—focuses their faith. Professional Christian theologians, though not divorced from liturgical or lay influences, labour in a specialized language, one that requires them to be both punctilious and poetic (and sometimes pugnacious) as they interpret and contest doctrines. As Justo González clarifies, "Doctrines are human words. . . with which the church seeks to witness the Word of God" (*Christian Thought: Beginnings to Chalcedon* 27). In classical, doctrinal Christology, the Word becomes words—commonly in genres like creeds, confessions, catechisms, treatises, or apologies. A literary Christology, somewhat similarly, explores how the Word becomes words—usually in novels, poems, or plays. Details of the kinship between these theological and literary arts will be fleshed out as the chapter develops; nevertheless, at this embryonic stage of my discussion it remains vital to recognize certain semblances. Doctrinal Christology, generally, involves a type of literary exercise, one which wrestles with the implications of using words to assign identities to Jesus. Post-colonial literary Christology involves a type of "theological" exercise—not one which seeks or sympathizes with explicit Christian confession, but one that cunningly remixes or otherwise strategically appropriates elements of Christian mythology to critique colonial exploitation and clarify certain challenges

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of post-colonialism.[9] The feature of the Christ myth that my study addresses regards its propensity for paradoxical formulation, which I will discuss in further detail in a moment. In terms of post-colonial bearing, I contend paradox represents a strategy of simultaneous identification and differentiation, often explicitly inspired by Christology, which has enchanted literary renderings of post-colonial passion, failure, and revivification emerging from diverse corners of the post-colonial Anglosphere.

At the heart of the classical Christological struggle to characterize the Christ, this paradox pulses: unlike many variations of Hinduism, in which divinity and humanity are accepted as approximate or contiguous enough to allow a single person to be identified comfortably as both, Christianity generally insists on a considerable, if not impassable, distance between divinity and humanity, even while insisting that its central figure paradoxically characterizes both (Crisp 8). The full co-existence of divinity and humanity in the Christ arguably inspires or enables the many other paradoxical identities attributed to him, including Lord and servant, stranger and friend, prophet and high priest, Eschaton and great physician. As Lester DeKoster explains, "The term [paradox] roots in the Greek notion of counter-speech. It implies the enunciation of both sides of the *contradictory* as equally true; say in the affirmation of divine sovereignty as absolute and of human responsibility as no less absolute" without seeking "refuge in dialectic" where these contradictions can be synthesized or otherwise resolved (100). Echoing DeKoster, John Milbank reads the distinction between paradox and dialectic this way: "Paradox affirms the full reality of the impossible and the contradictory, whereas dialectics declares that an existing contradiction, because it is a contradiction, must be destroyed" (189). Milbank contends that paradoxical Christology does not need "to be 'completed' by a dialectic, but would in reality be betrayed by the latter" (114).[10] Paradox, in contrast to this understanding of dialectic, suggests that radical distinction need not impair the enjoyment of absolute identification, even though this flagrantly violates straightforward logic. Otherwise put, although it is "orthodox," according to various Christological formulations that seek that stamp, to say the Christ is divine, saying the Christ is *only* divine is entirely heterodox. Any Christological articulation, in order to remain "orthodox," evokes its paradoxical inversion: iconography of the broken, dead Jesus are as orthodox as are gold leaf paintings of the

risen, glorified Christ, but each is *only* orthodox insofar as it is accompanied by the recognition that every

Christological articulation always-already contains its inversion.

Whatever feature of the Christ myth a particular Christological articulation highlights, its meaning is

always incomplete, its meaning is "always deferred"—to ply a key concept from Jacques Derrida's *Of*

Grammatology—because it continually educes and confronts its inversion and "deferred presence" (9) of its

seeming negation. The Christ myth generates, in deconstructionist terms, "an endless regression" of

interpretations "without any stable, essential meaning" (Cuddon 223), and contends "no master word, no

ultimate foundation of meaning that must end the series" of interpretations (Garrison 349). Although for

Derrida, the sign becomes a "deferred presence" largely by being "put in place for the thing itself", which is

how the "sign represents the present in its absence" (9), my thesis contends that the Christ paradox defers

meaning somewhat differently: the Christ, when signified, does not direct[11] us to just an absence but to an

explicitly evoked, if not venerated, inversion. Otherwise put, every Christological affirmation explicitly

references its "absent inversion." Gerald O'Collins notes that this dynamic of the Christ myth makes

Christology a "yet-but" (*Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* viii) practice,

where every "significant affirmation will always call for further qualifications, explorations, and additions"

(viii). With this in mind, an argument that Derrida boldly makes about "everything" (266) in *Writing and*

Difference, I apply in a more modestly contextualized manner to the Christ myth,

> whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, *nachträglich*, belatedly,
>
> supplementarily: for the *nachträglich* also means supplementary. The call of the supplement is
>
> primary, here, and it hollows out that which will be reconstituted by deferral as the present. The
>
> supplement, which seems to be added as a plenitude to a plenitude, is equally that which
>
> compensates for a lack (qui supplee). Suppleer: 1. To add what is missing, to supply a necessary
>
> surplus," says Littre, respecting, like a sleepwalker, the strange logic of that word. (*Writing and*
>
> *Difference* 266)

The generative tension at the heart of the Christ paradox stems from the necessity of every Christological

formulation to elicit, by design, a "yes-but" response, one that seems to add to what has already been said

("plenitude to a plenitude") by implicitly referencing the absent inversion ("a lack") that every articulation of the Christ paradox demands. Davey, in his irenic reconciliation of hermeneutic and deconstructionist appreciations of "difference", interprets this deferral of meaning as a "hermeneutical differential that formally blocks understanding from completing itself [and] perpetuates *the motion necessary to keep understanding open* to the possibility of further responses" (14). An argument Davey makes about hermeneutic encounters with all "artwork or text" can be more modestly applied and perhaps more vividly witnessed in the hermeneutic dynamics the Christ paradox necessitates: "a hermeneutic experience worthy of the name *disrupts* the expectancies one has of an artwork or text so that one is forced to think again" (12). To sample a line from an Anne Walden poem, "the center of reference becomes movement in this ritual" (Walden). And as we shall see, when this movement keeps "turning and turning in the widening gyre" (Yeats) of global Christology, the Euro-centre cannot hold, things deconstruct, and myriad Christologies are "loosed upon the world." In an English-language, post-colonial literary context, invocations of the Christ myth rarely self-consciously advance a Christ myth that can be ordered easily into patristic Christological formulations (any more easily, I might add, than can the Christ myth as it is presented in any one gospel or epistle in the New Testament). Rather, these texts, in alluding to the Christ myth, in invoking the absent inversions it always-already embodies, strategically evoke the myths' paradoxes, and its consequences, to interpret post-colonial struggles.

My "literary Christology" studies the post-colonial literary value of invoking a symbol that by self-conscious contrivance seemingly countermands what it most explicitly suggests in its immediate "signified presence." Here, Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization that a "double-voiced discourse" animates the genre of the novel immediately seems hospitable to a discussion regarding double meanings in literary texts. Bakhtin argued that the novel, somewhat uniquely, evinced the social contingency—and therefore the instability, plurality, and contested condition—of language. Literary meaning, according to Bakhtin, is neither generated entirely in the intention or interpretation of an utterance but within its "refraction" (313) and negotiation between the two (generating a double-voice). "Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions," wrote Bakhtin: "language is populated—

overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (294). Bakhtin's ideas about "double-voiced discourse" speak

to this dissertation in at least two ways. Firstly, as Charles Lock and Alexander Mihailovic have separately

argued, Bakhtin's language of "double-voiced discourse" liberally seizes on the Christological language with

which the Orthodox tradition framed the Christ paradox. Lock's liturgically-oriented study considers how

"paradox is the characteristic mode" (71) of much communal meditation within the Orthodox tradition, and

proceeds to decipher semblances between Bakhtin's understanding of "dialogue" and paradoxical notions of

identification and differentiation in Orthodox renderings of the Christ myth (Lock, "Carnival and

Incarnation: Bakhtin and Orthodox Theology." 78). Mihailovic presents a much more explicit and sustained

examination of Baktin's Christological tropes, especially those related to the Christ myth's paradox, arguing

that Bakhtin's "paradox of polyphony is portrayed in term that are patently those of Trinitarian coinherence"

(12).[12] Secondly, key related terms regarding literature that Bakhtin engineered from Trinitarian tropes—

dialogism, hybridity, heteroglossia, polyphony—have been appropriated by Homi Bhabha to explore post-

colonial "rhetorical processes of cultural negotiation" (269), and by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., to theorize how

African American literary traditions deliver hidden polemics through double-voiced discourses (Zappen 17).

Bakhtin demonstrates the possible contiguity between the sacred tropes of classical Christology and tropes

cherished by literary critics of colonialism and racism.

Interpretations of the Christ paradox have had serious fallout, existential and political, for Christian

conquerors and their conquered alike. Deborah Cherry's reading of Derrida's in *La Dissemination* contends

"that the supplement is dangerous precisely because its textual movement is unstable and slippery, disrupting

binary oppositions and securities of meaning" (Cherry 157-58; Derrida *Dissemination* 108-111). In *Acts of

Literature*, Derrida similarly describes this surplus/supplement as "maddening" and a "terrifying menace"

because it "promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away" (95–96). Joerg Rieger's study of the

Christ paradox, *Christ and Empire: From Paul to Post-colonial Times*, notes the considerable historical

fallout of the "Christological surplus" (9) necessitated by "yet-but" and "think again" dynamics of the Christ

paradox. Rieger details how key junctures in Christological thought have often accompanied, and attempted

to endorse, expansions in empires, yet this surplus in meaning the Christ paradox generates has ultimately

overwhelmed attempts to politically domesticate the Christ myth. As Rieger's study repeatedly illustrates, wildly unpredictable have been the consequences of leveraging a paradoxical myth—one that perpetually demands "yet-but", "think again", double-voiced difference/deference—to expand *or* resist empire. The Christ paradox has generally proven resilient to extended political subordination because the surplus of meanings it generates cannot be contained and channeled towards narrow political ends. The multivalent, paradoxical Christ myth simultaneously condemns and redeems the historical discordances in which the post-colonial English-language literature remains embroiled, including the blunt fact that even as these texts level punishing criticisms against colonialism, they do so using a language and literary forms with deeply colonial provenances (Ponzanesi 1–2). To borrow from Barbara Johnson's explanation of literary deconstruction, the Christ paradox carefully teases out the "warring forces of signification within the text itself" (3; see also Cuddon 222).

Before continuing, I should note that for analytic and symbolic logicians, studying paradox is approached fairly differently than I approach it here. Their study involves delicately dismantling the propositional girding of a statement to determine where it grinds into paradox. Well-known examples of such statements include the "liar's paradox"—"This sentence is not telling the truth"—which cannot be true if it is true. Although I may gingerly borrow insights from these scholars' exacting investigations into semantic theory, the paradoxes I study deal with aesthetic transfigurations of Christ figures into literary genres, and these paradoxes cannot be neatly distilled into logical propositions. At least in the case of the literary texts I will be working with, "the disclosive capacity of language has a wildness about it that is not subject to propositional enclosure" (Davey 25). The early "definition" of paradox I invoke comes very close to a synonym that sometimes takes its place in Christological thought: "antonymy." Unlike its common usage, which simply connotes "opposite", antonymy proposes a strategy of naming ("anti-naming", for the Christ has designations whose connotations contradict each other) which suggests a variance from, or tension towards, another literary term, "metonymy" ("meta-naming"). This is an issue I will revisit in more detail during my later discussion on "logocentrism" and how post-colonial thought fits into this study's interdisciplinary equation. At that point, I will introduce the contention that colonial hegemonies depend on

commanding dominant discursive metonymies, and that the Christ myth can defy these hegemonies by destabilizing their discursive metonymies, primarily because those metonymies cannot contain its logical volatility, its need to effectuate antonymy, its surplus of meaning. After all, even Hades, according to Charles Lock's reading of John Chrysostom, was "tricked by its failure to understand the tropes—metonymic, sacramental, cosmological" that the Christ paradox inverts ("Carnival and Incarnation" 81)

3. Surveying Paradox and Christology across Christian Traditions

Far from being a post-colonial innovation, the Christ myth has demonstrated proneness towards paradox across much Christian thought. The Christ myth has largely enunciated this paradox through a network of nominal antonymies that are rooted in their particular cultural, philosophical, theological contexts. Critically appreciating the dynamics of the Christ myth, I believe, can help us better appreciate its literary power.

Surveying some key early Christian texts—that is, texts that would later be considered canonical within "classical", "creedal" or "orthodox" Christian traditions—illustrates the centrality of the paradox to these traditions. Geza Vermes's audit of the New Testament Christologies, *The Changing Faces of Jesus*, compellingly details the range of their pluralism and demonstrates how these texts frequently referred to the Christ as human and divine (see also Matera 95, 128). Similarly, Clement of Rome's pastoral letter to the church in Corinth (c. 96 CE) liberally refers to the Christ in human and divine terms, helping us appreciate how early Christians invoked the Christ paradox, but offering little theoretical exposition on the dynamics of the paradox itself. By the early second century, Christian writers were already becoming more systematic and emphatic in defending the paradox at the centre of their faith, primarily in response to competing Christologies that attempted to resolve or relax its tensions. Consider how Ignatius of Antioch, writing to the church at Smyrna in the second century, championed the Christological paradox *against* Christological interpretations advanced by Docetists (who argued that Christ's humanity was an illusion):

There is one Physician

Both flesh and spirit

Begotten and unbegotten,

In man, God,

In death, true life,

Both from Mary and from God,

First passible and then impassible,

Jesus Christ our Lord. (R. M. Grant 38)

By the early third century, Tertullian of Carthage had made at least two significant contributions to entrench this paradox within Christian thought. First, arguing against Christological "monarchists," who denied any distinctions between persons of the Godhead (thus preserving the "divine monarchy"), Tertullian famously defended the Christ paradox by asserting its necessity: "The death of God"—the logically taxing pairing of mortality and immortality—"must be believed *because*" it is absurd; "He was buried, and rose again: it is certain *because* it is impossible" (19)[13]. Second, Tertullian presented his Christological formulations using Roman legal language, characterized by its heavily propositional posture and authoritative gait within its milieu (quite unlike the narrative, pastoral, and liturgical tone of earlier Christian writing). This linguistic shift not only affected the tone of much subsequent theological debate—where "arguments do not seek to convince as much as to overwhelm" (González, *Christian Thought: Beginnings to Chalcedon* 74)—it also furnished Christian thought with some of its most cherished extra-Biblical theological terms associated with the Christ paradox, such as "substance" and "person," which Tertullian distilled from "the juridical terminology of his time" (González, *Christian Thought: Beginnings to Chalcedon* 178). Using the linguistic rigour and step-by-step rhetorical strategies of a lawyer, Tertullian argued that orthodox Christology is paradoxical. Tertullian, like Christian thinkers before and after him, demonstrated that one is never *only* a Christian: his Christological formulations were furnished using available culturally and politically coded language. As Anne McClintock observes, "no social category exists in privileged isolation; each comes into being in relation to other categories, if in uneven and contradictory ways" (9). This insight need not diminish the artistry of Tertullian's

formulations, but it presents a vivid, early illustration of how such formulations are culturally, linguistically and politically entangled: no Christology is immaculately conceived in an imagination innocent of its historical assignations. Catherine Keller, for example, reads the history of Christian theology as formal practice in Tertullian's sense, as a "Platonic concept [that] affected the syncretism of colonized Judaism with a colonizing Hellenism. Christian arguments—and increasingly faith was about arguments rather than witness—were persuasive inasmuch as they absorbed the imperial metaphysics" (*God and Power* 114).

By the fourth century, as the church began exercising greater access to Roman legal powers, Tertullian's influence would enshrine itself within two hallmark documents in Christian thought: the creeds of Nicaea (325 CE) and declaration of Chalcedon (451 CE), which were both composed in response to controversies regarding the Christ paradox. These "central declarations of Christian thought," as Hugh S. Pyper contends, present Christological "paradoxes in their starkest form. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Neither nature can be compromised. Every position deemed heretical seeks to soften the paradox by accommodating the human to the divine or vice versa" ("Paradox." 516). Nicaea affirmed Jesus was "true God from true God, begotten not made" that he "became incarnate" and "suffered" (in González, *Christian Thought: Beginnings to Chalcedon* 267). Not long after Nicaea, the Christology of Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389 CE), which twentieth century existentialist theologian Paul Tillich identified as "the definitive formulae for the doctrine of the Trinity" (76), drew generously from the paradoxes the creed heralded: "they [Christ's divinity and humanity] are divided without divisions, if I may so say; they are united in their division. . .excesses and defects we will omit, neither making the unity a confusion, nor the division a separation" (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 61).

By this time, we can already see how meditation, deliberation and declarations of "orthodoxy" hinged on the intensity and precision with which Christological hermeneutics could produce a Christological paradox. The Nicaean creed may have been intended to defend the Christ paradox from movements that seemed to temper the paradox, such as Arianism, but cultural and linguistic divides across the Christian world were already proving that some who found themselves near the fringes of

orthodoxy believed their Christologies sustained the paradox more forcefully and faithfully than those that were quickly becoming canonized. A heated fourth century exchange between the Greek bishop of Alexandria and a Latin bishop of Rome (both named Dionysius), is illustrative. In the West, since Tertullian's time, "substance" referred to the shared divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who were identified as "persons." Because the term "person," in Greek, also translates as "face" or "mask," this term seemed to deny the fullness of Christ's humanity or divinity to Greek Christians. The vague and wanting translation of the Latin term "substance" (so key to Tertullian's Christology) into Greek further complicated communication, as did the absence of the definite article in Latin grammar (leaving Greek translations without distinctions between "God" and "god"), and contrasting connotations in Latin and Greek regarding the meaning of "flesh" (as in "the Word was made flesh," John 1:14). This controversy left each bishop trying to prove the credentials of his orthodoxy by demonstrating how he used language that more rigorously characterized the Christ paradox (González, *Christian Thought: Beginnings to Chalcedon* 258; Inbody 55; see also Crisp 34).

In 362 CE, at what might otherwise be considered a minor, stop-gap synod in Alexandria held between the great councils of Nicea and Chalcedon, Athanasius—one of Arius's fiercest opponents at Nicea—reconciled Latin and Greek factions by declaring that "verbal differences were not important, as long as the meaning was the same" (González, *Christian Thought: Beginning to Chalcedon* 283). Later in this chapter, we will consider post-colonial theorists who question if meaning can be so independent of language, but at this relatively early moment in Christological thought we witness efforts to keep the Christ paradox unfettered to a single, sacralized language. The Christ paradox, according to Athanasius, could find equally legitimate expression in Latin or Greek, even though Latin theologians used Christological language in a manner that suggested monarchism to Greeks, and Greek theologians used Christological language that suggested tritheism (positions at the opposite poles of the Christological debate!) to their Latin counterparts. Although Athanasius's irenic gesture did little to mollify long-brewing Christological differences between the ancient Eastern see of Alexandria, which tended to emphasize Christ's divinity, and Antioch, which tended to emphasize Christ's humanity, it nevertheless

attempted to acknowledge and accommodate this Christological pluralism without compromising the fullness of the Nicean Christ paradox. Anticipating Bakhtin, who emphasized the cultural contingency between signifiers and that which they signify, Athanasius recognized that across cultural and linguistic spectra, similar signifiers can connote different significations. The implications of Athanasius's ancient declaration for post-colonial Christology will become increasingly apparent, but even in his era we can recognize how it anticipated the definition of Chalcedon, which streamlined Greek, Latin, Alexandrian and Antiochian Christologies by remaining vague, if not silent, on what divinity or humanity ontologically entailed, while affirming that (whatever divinity and humanity might mean) the Christ is fully like God in his divinity and fully like us in his humanity.

Nicea and Chalcedon would significantly shape Christology by appropriating various existing Christologies of their time, refining and canonizing them into the rubric of "orthodoxy," excluding others (or at least trying to), and framing the terms of much future Christological debate. The Christological formulations that emerged from Nicea and Chalcedon did not posit a lasting ontology about the internal workings of the triune Godhead as much as they affirmed a set of tenacious hermeneutical parameters which had contoured earlier Christological confessions and would govern future ones. Neither creed nor declaration exactingly spells out a definition of what constitutes divinity or humanity, which have been subject to shifting interpretations throughout Christian history, but both insist that when divinity and humanity encounter each other in the Christ, a paradox is at play. Inbody notes that Chalcedon states that the persons of the Trinity are of the same "substance," but never defines what that substance is (55). Nevertheless, as Robert Masson observes, Chalcedon's insistence that Christ's humanity and divinity remain "undivided and unseparated" renders the terms "inescapably contrapuntal" (63; see also Mihailovic 22). This vagueness about the nature of metaphysical divine substance, but clarity regarding their contrapuntal arrangement, allowed Nicea and Chalcedon to accommodate the Christology of Clement of Alexandria (c.150-215 CE) who, writing a century *before* Nicea, framed the distance between divinity and humanity as the difference between the knowable and the unknowable (Hägg 262). The councils could also accommodate the Christology of Augustine of Hippo who, writing a century *after*

Chalcedon, interpreted the Trinity using "relational metaphors," producing a Christology creatively consistent with Chalcedon, one written in "rhetorically challenging phrases that let believers savor the inherent paradox of preaching an incarnate God and, in so doing underlined the complexity and inner tensions of the Christian message" (Daley 101). Yet Augustine's Christology was not one that Nicea or Chalcedon had anticipated, for neither—astonishingly—speaks of love as a Christological concern. Augustine, however, advanced a Trinitarian Christology in which love provides the impetus for imagining and experiencing divinity: in Augustine's words, "love is of someone who loves . . . and something is loved with love," and by engaging this triad of "lover, beloved, and love" we can, according to Arendt's reading of Augustine, "make God present" (*Love and Saint Augustine 32*; see also Augustine, "Sermon 378" and Lombardi 22).

　　More than a century and half after Augustine's death, the historic Pope Gregory remained as committed as Augustine to speaking of God's qualities in paradoxes. Gregory spoke of God's sweetness in one breath, God's trials in the next, and God's paradoxical "sweet tortures," "delectable pains," "joyful sadness," "merciful severity," or "immutable mutability" in the third (Straw 21–22). Although Gregory was hardly shy about his respect for Augustine, González notes that in the short time between Augustine and Gregory, "one cannot help but feel that there is a chasm between the two" (*A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation* 71). R. A. Markus takes the contention a step further, describing Gregory as ironically neither a faithful disciple of Augustine nor of the major theologians he considered his forebears (xi). González, however, maintains that Gregory's doctrines of "God, the Trinity, and the person of Jesus Christ" were "orthodox and traditional" and reminds us that Gregory, along with Augustine, remains formally titled as one of the four doctors of the Roman Catholic tradition (González, *Christian Thought: Augustine to Reformation* 71). These early Christian writers and thinkers, from those who penned the New Testament to Pope Gregory, have sometimes been vague, and have sometimes differed with each other, on the ontology of the triune Godhead, but their faith finds considerable continuity in their shared commitment to the Christological hermeneutics of paradox. These writers and thinkers nurtured the latter genesis of Christian thought, inscribing paradox into its genetic

code, establishing paradox as the generative tension that vitalizes Christology. This encoding of paradox into Christology has enabled future peoples with Christian affinities, whose faith may have been as different from those of these "early fathers" as a mustard tree is from a mustard seed, to count their totemic fascination with Christ paradox as a signature of their theological heritage.

By the time Christological debate emerged from Nicea and Chalcedon, Christological controversies swelled less around the absoluteness of the Christ paradox and increasingly hinged on various parties' claims that each was most rigorously defending the paradox. Mounting such a defense often demanded mastery of arduously subtle grammar, abounding political savvy, and the patience to toil through the advanced calculus of competing Trinitarian formulations. Let us briefly consider how "fidelity" to the Christ paradox survived a series of "schisms" within the Christian communion. Is Christ "of" two natures, as Chalcedonians professed, or "in" two natures, as the dissenting "Nestorians" (including churches in Egypt, Ethiopia, Persia, India, and China) argued? Both parties believed their Christology was more faithful to the Christ paradox of Nicaea, and González among others argues that whereas Chalcedon smoothed many of the linguistic, cultural and political differences that inflamed discrepancies between Greek and Latin Christologies, the same unfortunately could not be said regarding linguistically and politically muddied theological differences between the Greco-Roman Christians and their Christian others (González, *Christian Thought: Augustine to Reformation* 104; see also Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 9; Grillmeier 281).

Did the insertion of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene creed in 1054 enrich or impoverish the Christ paradox? Rome argued that the clause, which stated that the third person of the Trinity "proceeds" from the first *and* the second persons, was necessary and clarifying. Eastern churches were not compelled by Rome's concern about Spanish bishops Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgel, who found in the absence of the *filioque* clause an avenue through which Nicea could be used to advance an "adoptionist" position on the Christ's divinity (which amounted to denying the fullness of Christ's eternal divinity) (Pelikan 185). Nineteenth century Russian Christian existentialist novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky, defending the historical position of his church, believed that the *filioque* clause attempted a

"rationalization of the Christian truth" and that "this rationalization of the Christian principle entailed the overcoming of the paradox of God's simultaneous transcendence and immanence in relation to the world, the paradox which is at the heart of Godmanhood" (B. K. Ward 170). The Roman Catholic and the Orthodox communions, though at odds, claimed to be defending the same paradox.

Consider, almost 500 years after the *filioque* controversy, the face-off between two Augustinian monks: the Roman Catholic humanist, Desiderius Erasmus, and the Protestant reformer, Martin Luther. Erasmus's text, *Folly*, stands as a major European Renaissance treatise on Christian paradox (Pavlovskis 5, 9, 215), and scholars of Luther claim that in Luther's work the "Christological paradox is the grammar of salvation" (G. Ward 26). Neither can be considered a lightweight in his commitment to the Christ paradox, or to Augustinian thinking (Piper 24), but even their points of agreement did not necessarily culminate in theological consensus. For example, while both agreed that Exodus 14:14 was a verse that spoke to a paradox about free will and the cause of evil—issues with far-reaching Christological implications—neither could agree with the other's interpretation (Silver 89). Disagreements over who was most orthodoxly paradoxical even emerged between Luther and his protestant contemporary John Calvin, who "fear[ed] no paradox" and "navigate[d] paradox so naturally and effortlessly" throughout his preaching ministry (DeKoster 99). Calvin wondered if Luther's doctrine of "exchange of attributes *(communicatio idiomata)*" between the Trinitarian persons was so liberal it "contradicted a proper doctrine of the distinction of Christ's natures because it threatened the reality of his human nature" (Edmonson 214). I raise this slate of complex controversies not to weigh in on what I consider the "best" formulation of the Christ paradox, nor to trivialize these Christological differences. Rather, I hope to demonstrate that the plurality of Christologies that claim fidelity to this paradox suggests that an enduring legacy of the Christ paradox has been its ability to operate, *de facto*, more as a broad hermeneutic principle than as a particular, *de jure*, ontological postulation.

Otherwise put, I want to establish the premise that whereas Christians have imagined the ontology of Christ's humanity and divinity differently, they have generally agreed that their ontological presuppositions must generate a paradox. The thirteenth century Scholastic Thomas Aquinas, writing a

millennium after Clement of Alexandria and drawing on Aristotle's metaphysics where Clement had

drawn on Plato's, framed the difference between humanity and divinity as the difference between eternity

(which he understood as the measure of permanent being) and time (the measure of movement)—a

position advanced, some 700 years later, by Danish Christian existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard, who

similarly described the Christ paradox as the "Absolute Paradox, in that it asserts the bridging of two

realms that are absolutely other . . . [the] realms of eternity and time" (Pyper, "Paradox." 316). The

Neoplatonism of Clement, the Aristotelian tendencies of Aquinas, and the proto-existentialism of

Kierkegaard may depend on differing metaphysical assumptions, but each produces a Christology that

gravitates towards paradox. The Christ paradox exemplifies the "vital instability of the word" (Davey xv)

which is partly why despite Christians' disagreements on its interpretation and expression, they have

recognized that if the Christ myth loses the tension of its central paradox, it loses the central mechanism

through which it generates its surplus of meaning.

Over the course of this dissertation I will demonstrate how Christological reflections encountered

in post-colonial literature—despite offering incisive and sometimes scathing critiques of classical

Christologies that sanctioned patriarchy, imperialism, and genocide—rarely stray beyond the orbit of a

very classical Christological preoccupation with paradox. To draw on a paradoxical term from Jürgen

Habermas, the Christ paradox, insofar as we recognize it as a hermeneutic issue, operates as a "transitory

a priori" of Christologies (84; see also Wachterhauser 6). It is transitory, because its particular, imagined

metaphysical composition remains contingent on its given historical context; it is *a priori,* because

paradox remains the matrix in which mythological antonyms, within that context, must confront each

other and co-exist without compromising their nameable individuation or the radical unity that their

encounter constitutes.

4.   Paradox and Pluralism: Treating Christology as a Hermeneutics of Paradox

Treating Christology as a hermeneutics of paradox need not entail denying the philosophical

context or contributions of patristic metaphysics, but neither does it demand pretending those metaphysics

must be treated as normative or constitutive for the Christ paradox to thrive. Building on Hans George

Gadamer's aphorism that understanding emerges within historically and linguistically mediated "horizons

of consciousness," Thomas Guarino cites Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Thomas Kuhn,

William Van Orman Quine and Wilfred Sellars to illustrate how major strains of Christian thought have

"allowed one form of ontology and one form of epistemology—that is, some form of metaphysical

realism—to dominate its theology of revelation" (24). Guarino contends that while much Christian

thought has treated "Hellenistic or quasi-Hellenistic" philosophy as normative, "such normativity is

illusory and inappropriate" since "much contemporary philosophy has shown, the fundamental horizons

of this ontology have been deconstructed" (24). This deconstruction, he continues, leaves contemporary

theology with the responsible option of giving "proper ontological and epistemological weight" to

"cultural and linguistic determinacy," "the priority of flux," and the "encompassing horizons of finitude

and temporality" (Guarino 24). One family of discursive movements that pushed "the fundamental

horizons of this ontology" has often been titled the "hermeneutics of suspicion," which include affinities

to critical orientations as diverse as "poststructuralism, historicism, feminism, Black and Latin American

liberation theologies" (Inbody 45) along with, as Guarino makes explicit, deconstruction. To this

catalogue, I would add post-colonialism. This study draws liberally from these suspicious hermeneutics,

but before I discuss their relationship to Christology, or to the possibilities of pluralism generated by the

hermeneutics of paradox, it would be judicious to consider some of the key implications regarding the

pluralism we recognize when treating Christology as a *de facto* hermeneutic practice.

A hermeneutic approach to Christology, in acknowledging "that language and history are always

both conditions and limits of human understanding," and "the very meaning and validity of any

knowledge-claim is inextricably intertwined with the historical situation of both its formulators and

evaluators" (Guarino 24), recognizes why contemporary Christologies must still come to terms with

Nicea and Chalcedon. Roger Haight, a post-modern Jesuit Christologist, notes that these ancient

Christological formulations "continue to shape Christological consciousness after 1500 years," even

though "one cannot just repeat the classical formulas, because they do not have the same meaning in our

culture as they did when they were formulated" (Davey 216). Dismissing these formulas denies how their influence has rippled through Christian histories because the questions that these councils raise and leave unanswered—including "who Jesus was in ontological terms" (Haight 16)—remain staple Christological preoccupations. The historical influence and ambiguity of these formulas leaves us with no serious option, according to Haight, other than to "engage the classical councils and explicitly interpret them for our own period" (16). A hermeneutic approach to Christology recognizes that what Nicaea and Chalcedon bequeathed to Christology was not a set of strict and static metaphysics, but a pairing of mythic antonymies, cast in a paradox, whose meanings have morphed through various Christian traditions. Ulrich Luz, referencing Demetrios Panagopoulos, has similarly contended that creedal formulations of "two natures" are a "hermeneutic key" to patristic Christology, treating the doctrine as a "human linguistic construct, not a direct representation of the reality of God or Christ" (309).

Keep in mind, for hermeneutic philosophy "Being that can be understood *is* language," (Gadamer, "On The Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" 292, emphasis mine), therefore rendering doctrines into linguistic constructs does not strip those doctrines of their *realness*. Rather, hermeneutic approaches to Christological doctrines seek the sanctification of those doctrines within the most charged of sphere of consciousness hermeneutic philosophy permits: the sphere of language. For hermeneutic philosophers, language is the realm of the real, so to think of the Christ linguistically is to think of the Christ realistically. As Gadamer contends, "Reality does not happen "behind the back" of language. . .reality happens precisely *within* language" ("On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection" 292). Indeed, Nicholas Davey's exegesis of Han Waldenfels's Christian hermeneutics posits parallels "between the ontological primacy of language and certain notions of divine love" (Davey 216). Davey expands on Waldenfels's parallel by contending "that the generative capacity of language is a *miraculum*: an object of wonder (*mirus*-wonderful), an irreducible mystery, the *fons et origo* of our being" (217).[14] Far from elevating language into some otherworldly plane, such statements draw attention to how hermeneutics yokes "linguisticality" and "historicity" in a manner that stresses how even the lofty

language of transcendence is indebted to the contingences of the history which help shape it, and to which it helps give shape.

Considering this linguistic intimacy between imaginings of historicity and transcendence, Inbody is hardly being disparaging when positing Chalcedon was pivotal in formalizing Christology as a "language game"—one that had, and would, engender divergent Christological compositions. He is, rather, aligning an explicitly hermeneutic approach to Christologies, one that recognizes how historically and linguistically diverse Christologies pursue some mode of continuity or alignment with Nicaea and Chalcedon within their formulations. As Inbody explains,

> Chalcedon never answered in its creedal formula the metaphysical and the theological questions which remained following the adoption of the formula. Rather, it is most appropriate to interpret the language of the Chalcedonian formula in terms of its function in the church, vis., it is properly spoken of both as God—the divine Logos—and as a human being. To give an accurate account of him if one is to speak with the orthodox church, one must talk in two ways about him (human and divine) simultaneously. Both accounts are necessary. The formula dictates not a Christology as such (a metaphysical and theological explanation of how the claims can be held together), but rather provides the formal outline and the formal language which are the criteria for a proper Christological language (58–59).

Christological language, here, does not entail appealing solely to etymology in order to find and fix authoritative denotations of philosophically loaded and historically volatile terms, such as divinity and humanity, within their original, historically mediated context. As we have already discussed, foundational Christological terms have since the time of their introduction spawned disparate interpretations, and continued contentiousness over these interpretations has often focused on whose interpretation allowed the polarities of the Christ paradox to remain consummate without compromising the coherence of a monotheistic faith. This absence of fixity in the interpretation of Christological language has sparked bitter Christological controversies, but it has also necessitated Christological pluralism, synchronically and diachronically, across cultures and eras. "While there may be only one God," argues theologian

James Anderson, "there is surely more than one doctrine of the Trinity; at any rate, there is more than one *interpretation* of that distinctive teaching expressed in the ancient creeds and confessions of the church" (*Paradox in Christian Theology* 33).

Briefly revisiting Inbody's Wittgenstein-inspired description of hermeneutics as a "language game" may be helpful. The rules of chess are certainly as strict and rigid as the hermeneutical rules decided at Nicea and Chalcedon, but the number of possible chess games that can be played, even within those confining rules, is astonishing. Mathematician David Shenk tells us that the number of possible moves in an average chess game (10 to the 120th power) is more than the number of electrons in the universe (10 to the 79th power) (Shenk 58). Similarly, each key on a piano is "rule-bound" by the engineering of the instrument to strike a specific note, but the combination of notes, and the styles in which they can be accented, seems inexhaustible. But chess remains chess, a piano remains a piano, and Christology remains Christology, despite the range that each can be "played." As Gadamer contends, "A game would not be a game if every player followed the same 'correct' routine of identical moves, with a predictable and identical outcome on each occasion" (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 109). Similarly, if Nicea and Chalcedon had established a single interpretation of the Christ, all future theology and Christian reflection would be condemned to parroting what has already been said (akin to playing the same chess game over and over for centuries). What we get from these councils, instead, is the basis for Christological hermeneutics that afforded Christian thinkers, across continents and ages, opportunities to present a range of Christologies that attempted to remain faithful to the "rules of the game" set out at Nicea and Chalcedon. Karl Rahner echoes this sentiment when he contends that classical Christological formulations, that "anyone who takes seriously the 'historicity' of human truth (in which God's truth too has become incarnate in revelation) must see that neither abandonment of a formula nor its preservation in petrified form does justice to human understanding" (149).

If early Christians could not always agree on what their creedal Christological terms meant, the gulf between ancient and contemporary understandings of these terms, even within a Western context, should hardly be surprising. As Roger Haight explains, regarding the term "person":

> One issue arises from the sharp differences in meaning between the term 'person' as it was used in patristic and medieval theology, and the meanings it has come to assume in the modern period. Today a 'person' is a being, most immediately known through self-consciousness. . .The doctrine of the Trinity was formulated with a different ontological notion of person, and it did not mean that three conscious, free, and independent subjects made up the Godhead. (469)

Anderson, similarly, observes that "it is not altogether clear that the orthodox creeds *require* that personalities (in the modern sense) be ascribed to each of the divine persons" (*Paradox in Christian Theology* 33). Jennifer Anne Herrick takes the argument one step further, contending that much Christology includes "the legacy of Greek metaphysical, German idealist and modern individualist philosophies" that, in many contemporary cultural contexts, reduce the Christ paradox to "tritheistic or modalistic interpretation" and "endanger that which distinguishes Christianity theologically" (271). These theologians are addressing the hermeneutic dissonances between contemporary first-world languages and the archaic poetics of creeds formed in those languages' histories: similar dissonances between classical Christological poetics and contemporary languages can be intensely exacerbated as Christian thought has, and continues, to encounter linguistic communities whose histories have unfolded outside the hegemony of European Christendom, or on whose backs European Christendom's history has unfolded. O' Collins reminds us that within classical Christian tradition interpretations of the divine/human dyad of the the Christ paradox have served as a metaphor that explicitly evokes parallel dyads such as "infinite/finite," "matter/spirit," "time/eternity" and "transcendent/immanent"—pairings that have presented classical Western philosophies with "huge ontological gaps" (*Christology* 233).

But these gaps may not exist, at least as starkly, in contemporary philosophies, non-Western and Western. "Why should one be apprehensive," asks Aloysius Pieris, "about Asian theologians who find both the Hebrew concept of God and the Greco-Roman elaborations of Chalcedon pedagogically

misleading and culturally meaningless in the context of Asia's multifarious perceptions of the Absolute (162)? Similar questions could be asked about the relevance of Hellenistic Christological language to African, South Asian, Caribbean and First Nations cosmologies. Robert Masson summarizes this position by mounting a succinct defense of Haight's hermeneutic Christology:

> He insists that the problem is not with what Chalcedon intended and affirmed (the divinity and salvific significance of Jesus) but with the theoretical tools the council had at its disposal to express its intention. While the council played the divine and human notes as contrapuntal, Haight claims that the incarnate Logos paradigm did not provide the means to insure that the counterpoint would be clearly heard in subsequent generations and theologies. (64)

The ways in which this counterpoint *has* been generated in a number of post-colonial theologies, however, is worth noting, for it helps illustrate the linguistic malleability, and the tenacity, of the Christ myth.

When German-trained Korean theologian, Ahn Byung-Mu, returned to South Korea in the 1960s, he realized that his Christian theology was mired in Western theological questions that provoked Western theological answers, displacing Korean lines of inquiry (Küster 154). Ahn, instead, found the Christ paradox present in the concept of *Minjung*, a Korean word whose closest approximate translation might be "people," but also connotes both strength and weakness. This realization led him to develop a robust "congregational Christology" and attributed to it "a certain paradox . . . which runs diametrically counter to the Western conception of suffering" (Küster 159). E. Stanley Jones, an early eighteenth century American missionary in India, argued that the Johnine Jesus's claim that he was "the way, the truth, and the life" hardly seems paradoxical in English, but when translated into Hindu terms—"I am the Karma Marga. . . the Gyana Marga. .. and the Bhakti Marga" (S. Jones 178) —might occasion a very rich paradox regarding relationships between Vedic understandings of devotion, cognition and soteriology. Jones presents this poetic conflagration as happy evidence of an enculturated Christology, one that allows Christ theoretically to "become African, Indian, Sri Lankan, Filipino, and Bolivian in the same measure in which he became Greek and Latin" (Haight 21). In effect, enculturated Christology attempts to loosen

Christology from the metaphysical baggage of patristic language while sustaining an attraction to the paradox that this language tried to frame. Note that these Christologies do not necessarily highlight divinity and humanity as poles of their Christ paradox, for divinity and humanity are not necessarily antonymies within their respective cultural contexts. Instead, these Christologies incarnate their culture's own antonymies into their Christ paradox. Similar examples could be drawn from the treatment of the Christ paradox in African thought, such as Horton's work on particularity and omnipresence in Nuer and Dinka religious philosophy (R. Horton 268, 290); or Valentina Alexander's study of "passive radicalism" within strains of Caribbean Christology (Alexander, *Breaking Every Fetter? To What Extent Has The Black-Led Church In Britain Developed a Theology of Liberation?* 228; see also Soares, "Eden after Eve: Christian Fundamentalism and Women in Barbados" on paradoxes of Christian fundamentalist feminism in Barbados); or Chief Snow of the (Canadian) Stoney People's ecological extension of the Christ paradox to include not just polarities between divinity and humanity, but between creator and all of creation (Peelman 131). In all these cases, the Christ paradox, as divulged by classical and colonial Christian traditions, was deemed insufficiently paradoxical and demanded cultural intervention to rehabilitate its contrapuntal "orthodoxy."

Indeed, this rehabilitation has often confronted colonial Christianity with the tensions between the architecture of its mythology and the paradox that mythology claimed to house. Consider the notable case of the late early nineteenth century Hindu "reformer" and foundational Unitarian thinker, Ram Mohan Roy. After surveying the swollen role the devil had developed in Christian mythology, Roy questioned why the Christ paradox would not be more radically realized in a mythic reconciliation between God and his devil (inspiring the Unitarian icon of the serpent wrapped around the cross) rather than God and his humanity (which is not that astonishing a stretch, in a Hindu context, to begin with). Roy's "heterodox" Christology evinces how the problematic Manichean manoeuvre of transforming the devil from God's agent to God's enemy—thanks in no small part to the vivid imaginations of Dante and Dominican Inquisitors—seriously risks impoverishing the paradoxical *scandalon* of incarnational Christology. When the devil is imagined as God's pure nemesis, the serpent wrapped lovingly on the cross may seem more

"scandalous" than the paradox of the incarnation itself. Yet even in his "heterodoxy," Roy's Christology demonstrates a keen sense of paradox that marks the Christ myth.[15] My thesis explores similar instances in which a hermeneutic approach to incultured wrestling with the Christ myth produces daedal, post-colonial Christologies that seek paradox in terms not always recognizable to colonizing Christians.

Lamin Sanneh, as fierce a critic of American imperialism as he is a seminal theorist and historian of Christian translation, develops this idea while pushing for a more radical understanding of the horizons of hermeneutic particularity, specifically regarding Christian revelation in colonial contexts. According to Sanneh: "It is clear that in employing vernacular languages for translation, missionaries saw these languages as more than arbitrary devices, but as endowed with divine significance, so that they may substitute completely for the language of revelation."[16] Rather than measuring the success of a translated Bible by evaluating how successfully it translated a supposedly "universal" theme into a "particular" language, Sanneh contends:

> In insisting on vernacular particularity, Christians [did] not wish to imply that God is not God, but that, in a certain sense and in particular cultural contexts and circumstances, God has definite, particular qualities and attributes which do not belong in other contexts and circumstances. It is not that these qualities and attributes are incompatible with God, but that something more, in respect to the pool of qualities and attributes, is added. In theological terms, these qualities and attributes become the modes and individual ways in which God becomes real for particular people in particular situations and circumstances, even though those situations and circumstances by their nature do not repeat themselves for everyone anywhere or to the same degree. The Psalmist may declare that God is a shield or a rock without our inferring from that the idea that other people in a different context may not refer to God as a tethering peg or the dewy-nosed one of cattle pastoralists. (31)

In this hermeneutic approach to Christology, following Sanneh's argument, translation could not instrumentally recode a "universal" message in particular (or "indigenous") terms that enjoyed

straightforward parallels within the proselytizer's native language. If we accept language and history as fonts of consciousness, translation involves linguistically reinventing Christology, which suggests particular expressions of the Christ paradox may speak primarily, if not almost exclusively, to communities within particular linguistic horizons of consciousness.

A striking, contemporary demonstration of Sanneh's contention would be Wonhee Anne Joh's *Heart of the Cross: A Post-colonial Christology,* in which Joh's Christology, firstly, draws on and develops Korean terms *han* and *jeong*, which defy literal or easy translation in English and enjoy considerable currency within Korean Christian theology. The terms can connote beliefs, states of being, as well as actions. Joh's thesis in *Heart of the Cross* is that *han* and *jeong* collude in the cross, in a manner that is philosophically paradoxical and politically radicalizing. Joh's text, even in its hermeneutic fidelity to the paradoxes enshrined in Nicea and Chalcedon, effectively demonstrates that the Christ paradox as it operates in Korean language and history is not necessarily the Christ paradox that manifests itself in English language and history. In her second, less explicit act of "translation," Joh explicates the ancient Christological paradox of identity using the nimble language of much contemporary critical discourse (the "hermeneutics of suspicion"). Joh's integration of discursive traditions, besides demonstrating how porous her hermeneutic horizons are, deftly evokes the role of translation in Christian mythology—which can read the Incarnation itself as an act of cosmic translation (see Young 158). Translating and introducing the paradox of *han* and *jeong* into contemporary English-language Christology and critical theory, Joh draws on Stuart Hall to clarify how "identity operates 'under erasure' in the 'interval between reversal and emergence'" (4). She references Trinh Minh-ha to clarify how "the process of naming is to 'dive headlong into the abyss of un-naming'" (17). She references Melanie Klein to argue that "dichotomy can no longer function as the only critical hermeneutics of resistance" (21). She draws on Bhabha's related notions of hybridity, mimicry, and interstitial "Third Space" to clarify "what prevents identities. . .from settling into primordial polarities" (41). She draws on Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theorization of abjection to clarify "the paradoxical dynamic of identity" with its "unremitting shifts and tensions" and "indetermination" (111). She draws on Sarah Oakley's work on

feminist philosophy and systematic theology to present paradox as the "backbone" (81) of Christian thought, which she further filters through her critical appropriation of Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian "phenomenological eschatology" of suffering and hope.[17] To paraphrase Sannah, Joh presents her Christology in the contemporary vernacular of academics in the humanities.[18] Her work illustrates Habermas's observation, in "A Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*," that translation takes place across generations as well as across more conventionally imagined cultural communities: "the language games of the young simply do not reproduce the practice of the aged" (248).

With such notions in mind, Joh emphasizes that articulating the Christ paradox in "culturally sensitive" terms hardly entails pacifying the Christ myth before whatever dominant cultural hegemonies it encounters.[19] Far from it: enculturating the Christ paradox entails hurling culturally coded antonymies against each other with the breakneck force that the Large Hadron Collider hurls high-energy particles against each other. Or, to fall back on a more tried-and-true image, enculturating the Christ myth involves breaking old wine skins with new wine. "If the acts of cultural translation," warns Andrew Walls, "by which the Christians of any community make their faith substantial cease—if (if one may use such language) the Word ceases to be made flesh within that community—the Christian group . . . is likely to lose, not just its effectiveness, but its powers of resistance" (13). Otherwise put, if what Christians have traditionally framed as their central paradox—the Word became flesh—ceases to register paradoxically within a community, the Christ myth risks being emptied of its critical potential. Sannah and Joh also present hermeneutically oriented understandings of Christology that, in recognizing the historical and linguistic particularity of a Christology need not impugn its actualization of the Christ paradox, appear uncannily aligned with Derrida's deconstructionist critiques of "logocentricism" in Western metaphysics. Within long traditions of Western philosophy, according to Derrida, the deferral of meaning followed a metonymic chain that equated the measure of truth with the measure of its generalizability (or "transcendence").

Thinking about how such a metonymic logic organizes academic disciplines can be illustrative. Traditionally, we imagine disciplines beget specialized fields, which beget further specialized fields, and so on: Christian studies begat Christology, which begat feminist Christology, and so on. Or, we imagine disciplines organize knowledge much like charts I remember from biology class organized life: a phylum contains an order; an order contains a genus; a genus contains a species; a species contains a sub-species; and so on. As one moves "up" how one is named within such biological hierarchies, differences between life forms are effaced by common denominators. For example, some may see feminist African Christology as a highly particularized sub-species of Christological inquiry: one can trace its discursive lineage "up" through to the "general" study of Christology by shedding its particularities while increasingly identifying with common discursive denominators. A similar phenomenon, suggests Derrida, has been imagined to organize *all* differences: each class of difference can be consumed into a super-class by virtue of emphasizing commonality over distinction, and this process can be repeated until *everything* finds its ultimate unity in a single meta-name, common de-nominator, or metonymic *logos* that orders truth through a taxonomic dispersion from identity (or commonality, unity, etc.) to difference. This logos was, for example, of the kind that Philo of Alexandria (González, *Christian Thought: Beginnings to Chalcedon* 43–46) and Stoic philosophers wrote about when they contended that the logos was a divine principle that made reasoning (indeed, logic) possible.

Derrida, in contrast, argues that differences, far from metaphysically moving up a metonymic chain until they collapse into transcendent logos, generate meanings as they are deferred across the power-laden hierarchies impressed in our historicity. For Derrida, the direction of this deferral significantly *is* what is meaningful. Deconstructing the "common denominators" in a logocentric metonymic chain, for example, involves interrogating how those who control the language of generalizability—that is, metonymy—manoeuvre to monopolize "truth" by measuring its metonymic proximity to a historically constructed, not metaphysically transcendent, "logos." In *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* written not long after the end of World War II, Hannah Arendt offers a thorough account of how totalitarian regimes—whether imperial, fascist, or both—depended on controlling metonymies of

national, religious, and "racial" identification and differentiation to secure their dominance. The Christologies Sannah and Joh imagine evince the anti-totalitarian strain in post-colonial thought in that they do not need to efface or erase their differences from Euro-American Christology, even if the specificity of their local poetics cannot be wholly translated across hermeneutic horizons: Sannah's and Joh's Christologies are not "logocentric," in Derrida's sense, because their particularity, their difference, is not a key measure of their incapacity for gospel truth.[20] These Christologies find sympathetic sentiments in Gadamer's observation, in *Hermeneutics and Logocentrism*, that "Whoever understands must understand *differently* if he wants to understand at all" (118). African feminist Christology, recognized this way, need not be diminished as an exotic, parochial variant of "serious" Christology. As González notes, third-world theologians "point out that so-called traditional theology is just as parochial in that it reflects the conditions and perspectives of the North-Atlantic, and that the reason why it does not appear parochial is the traditional dominance of the North-Atlantic" (*From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century* 471).

That traditional dominance is shifting, and this project is but one witness to that shift. Historical differences need not preclude the possibility of dialogue, even though they condition its tenor. Catherine Keller, for example, joins a list of scholars working outside literary departments (and specifically within the rubric of Christian studies[21]) who find post-colonial theory helps clarify the Christ myth for our age. Keller recognizes that certain "iconic" couplings found in Christological paradoxes, especially those whose soteriological exigency takes on more explicit eschatological expression, call "for a certain theological edginess, a double edge of hermeneutic ambivalence. This dynamism of doubling confuses the dyads of oppressor-oppressed and so sends theology to post-colonial theory for help" (*God and Power* 98, see also 59). Cautioning her readers not to "mistake post-colonialism for some triumphal declaration that colonialism is over and hybridity is hip" (*God and Power* 99), Keller wonders if "something Christian theology needs for its own work can be *found* in post-colonial translation?" (*God and Power* 131) Although my study is deeply indebted to these scholars' work, my interest tilts less towards what

post-colonialism has to say to Christology and more towards what Christology has to say to post-colonialism.

Theodore Ziolkowski's landmark investigation into literary Christ figures, *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus*, has lent itself to excellent post-colonial adaptation in Norman R. Cary's essay, "Comrade Jesus: Post-colonial Literature and the Story of Christ." Surveying a range of post-colonial characters Cary treats as Christ figures, he concludes,

> These novels, written since World War II by authors who are neither European nor American, replace the Euro-American Jesus figures with Jesus figures who are localized. Breaking free from the strictures of Western Christianity, the newly incarnated Jesus figure has become an effective post-colonial character who protests against injustice. (181)

Cary arrives at this conclusion following Ziolkowski's method, positing a character is "Christ-like" insofar as her or his narrative actions recall stories of Jesus as they are presented in the New Testament's gospels. As engaging as this method is, especially in terms of demonstrating how the Christ myth continues to enjoy literary currency and can lend itself to multiple literary renderings, my approach differs significantly. Although narrative action signals allusions to the Christ, I suggest that the paradoxical identity of the Christ should command our attention in ways that Ziolkowski and Cary generally ignore. Arendt's work on totalitarianism, as mentioned, highlights the metonymic logic of collective identification. In so doing, her work illustrates why the antonymic structure of classical Christology makes the Christ paradox such an inviting candidate for post-colonial literary reflection. In identifying fully with his antonymies, the Christ paradox disrupts metonymic logic of colonial identification and differentiation. Post-colonial "salvation" somehow depends not only on the Christ's actions, but on who the Christ *is*.[22] Allusions to the Christ myth, in my readings, allude to a subjectivity achieved not through metonymic coherence but sustained through a paradoxical identification with socially situated, cosmologically imagined antonymies.

5.   Culmination and Conclusion: The Trickster as a Subject of Christological Study

The assortment of fictional and historical figures characterized as tricksters is so abundant that it boggles attempts to pin down consistent connotations for the term. A modest sampling of the diverse cast of characters who have been titled tricksters includes: Hermes and Odysseus in ancient Greece (Stott 49; Crotty 171); Loki in Viking Scandinavia (Dunworth and Peterson 171); Krishna in India (Jackson 139); Monkey King in China (Giese 121); Coyote and Raven in North America (Cole 148–49); Jabuti in the Amazon (Portella and de Almeida xi); Anansi in the Caribbean (Austin-Broos 46); St. Peter in southern Europe (Christen 181–82); Èsù-Elegaba and Zomo in West Africa (Euba, "Lega and the Politics of Metaphysics: The Trickster in Black Drama." 167; Young and Ferguson 492; Norton 30); Brer Rabbit of the southern U.S (Baringer 129) and his more popular descendent, Bugs Bunny (Floyd 48); along with Jacob, the cozener of Genesis (J. E. Anderson, "Jacob, Laban, and a Divine Trickster?" 3–4) and his more popular descendent, Jesus (Weaver, *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture* 257). To this already eclectic list of tricksters—who ask cheeky questions ranging from, "What's up, doc?" to "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:28 ESV)—we can consider compelling arguments to include cynosures of the past century as varied as pacifist Mohandas Gandhi (Slaughter 46; Agarwal 88), boxer Muhammad Ali (Lemert) and contemporary British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen's post-colonial persona, "Ali G" (Gilroy 139). Faced with the sheer variety among mythologized and historicized tricksters—their explicit, assumed, or ambiguous masculinity notwithstanding—T.O. Beidelman reminds us that although the term "trickster," like the term "family," points to profoundly diverse yet uncannily analogous phenomena observable across global cultures, these terms "seem incomparable cross-culturally when taken out of context" (28). Even when taken in context, however, theorizing trickster discourse remains fraught with conspicuous risks, for how does one present a working definition for a figure that typically defies the dynamics of definition even as those dynamics operate within its given context?[23] As Lewis Hyde argues:

> [Trickster] also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We
> constantly distinguish—right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female,

young and old, living and dead—and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the

distinction. (7–9)

Contemporary trickster discourses present some helpful, if not ironically counter-intuitive,

exhortations on how to deal with these slippery customers. For starters, "if we seek absolutes," warns

David Heinimann, referencing Anne Doueiki (200), "the joke is on us for rejecting the incomplete reality

that trickster language intentionally constructs" (47). Hermeneutic modesty when listening to tricksters

seems *de rigueur*, as contemporary definitions of tricksters end up being wry, tentative, and aware that in

trying to study the skills of the figures they theorize as tricksters, a writer may be like a zoologist who

gets eaten by tigers he is theorizing as skilful carnivores. There is, however, a well-framed "fearful

symmetry" (Blake, "Tiger, Tiger") to this seeming idiocy. As Charles Lemert well puts it, in his exegesis

of Hyde's own opening "provisional definition" of tricksters:

> You can see the trickster at work in any attempt to define him. There is no one characteristic—not
>
> even *doubleness,* for he is legion. There is no one literary figure—not even the *creative idiot* for
>
> he is also the *wise fool . .* . Trickster is, in short, trickster—that character who is what he is
>
> without qualification, reduction, or emendation. (39)

Lemert and Hyde cleverly posit their opening, cursory qualifications of trickster figures via an extended

apophasis tangled in a tautology: they describe tricksters as characters who evade description, who by

definition refuse to be or cannot be confined to a definition, who ultimately baffle attempts to be assigned

a precise, lasting ipseity. This evasiveness is a popular manoeuvre in contemporary trickster discourse.

Regarding William J. Hynes's critical contributions to trickster theorization, Heinimann recognizes that if

> Hynes's interpretative theses on the trickster risk inviting the boundary-breaking that signifies the
>
> presence of the trickster, they also anticipate and then enact that breech in the concluding thesis of
>
> open-ended dissolution; the enactment steps beyond deconstructive denial to affirm what it knows
>
> it denies, which is the paradox at the heart of trickster performance. (47)

Writing the concluding chapter of his important edited collection with William G. Doty, *Mythical*

Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms, Hynes' closing words confess that despite all the

ink spilt and pixels lit positioning the trickster variously as "a demigod…a genre, a symbolic embodiment of human imagination, or a postmodernist hermeneutic momentarily reflecting back to us our relative place in a nearly infinite chain of signifiers," he is left "with lucid realization that whatever acumen we have gained" the trickster remains a "perplexing figure" (217).

A particularly gripping illustration of the seemingly unrestrained trickster theorization at play is Peter Cole's genre-defying drama-essay-poem, *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing: Coming Home to the Village*, in which Cole's judiciously referenced sources, lyrically engineered explications, and fierce social criticisms of issues (such as the pathologization of First Nations peoples under Canadian educational policies) are followed by gently undermining exegetical mockery from Coyote and Raven:

Coyote: boy that's a rant and half

Raven: I think that one's had bad experiences with psychology (141)[24]

Here, the tricksters trip-up the conventions, if not purposes, of exegesis to clarify, for as Raven earlier states, "clarity was never high on my agenda   I like muddy" (126, spacing in original). Echoing both Lemert and Hynes, Cole offers a tacit acknowledgement that trickster figures cease to be tricksters if tamed by stringent academic discipline, for a trickster whose tricks are predictable is toothless. The trickster might as well be presented as a staged circus act, a gimmick performer, or as the handiwork of a taxidermist, a specimen rendered still enough to be studied safely. Such approaches to trickster studies can be highly cautionary for those of us who do not want to cage the tricksters we engage. The trickster figures considered here are often shapeshifters or characters with a penchant for mischievous disguise; therefore, recognizing these tricksters (or their trickery) already sets us on a difficult chase. Even when recognized, these tricksters' motives for resorting to mischief can be varied and complex, but for our purposes I will emphasize features of tricksterism that have the most relevant Christological and post-colonial registers.

Trickster theorizations, much like core Christological theorizations, are plastered with references to paradox. Consider the following as a very modest but nevertheless telling sample from oft-cited "classics" in the field and from contemporary trickster discourse. Carl Gustav Jung described the trickster

myth, which he christened "Mercurius," as "obviously a duality, but . . . named a unity in spite of the fact [of] his innumerable inner contradictions," and as "the process by which the lower and material is transformed into the higher and spiritual, and vice versa" (Jung 237; see also Tannen 7). Paul Radin's influential development of these ideas, in his study of Winnebago tricksters, contented that the trickster binds "widely separated opposites into a single figure so that contraries appear to belong together" (238).[25] Lori Landay references Barbara Babcock-Abrahams's summary of prominent trickster discourses and their penchant for paradox—the "most important characteristic of these dualisms [order/disorder, life/death, creative/destructive] . . . is their expression of ambiguity and paradox, of a confusion of all customary categories" (Babcock-Abrahams 160-161)—to describe seminal American women tricksters as "paradox personified" and as "liberatory figure[s] whose dualism is a major trait" (Landay 13). Jeanne Rosier Smith, in her study of literary tricksters, similarly identifies a trickster as one who "embodies paradox; his or her ever-shifting form seems to negate the possibility of any 'stable' identity" (17). Contemporary trickster discourse, it seems, remains broadly congruent with Hyde's contention that a trickster "is the mythic embodiment of. . . contradiction and paradox" (7).

Considering how central paradox remains to formulations of the Christ myth across a range of Christological traditions, the *scarcity* with which the Christ myth has been recognized as a trickster deserves some attention. First, simple Eurocentric thinking may be responsible for ghettoizing trickster figures, as Joseph Campbell did, to "all non-literate mythology" (Campbell and Toms 39), that is, mythologies belonging to people formerly called "primitive" in anthropological discourse (Doueihi 195). Second, trickster studies as specific as Gloria Anzaldua's analysis of Coatlicue, the Aztec mother-trickster, or Jeanne Smith's broader literary survey, highlight the supposed "dualism of Western thinking" (Nayar 180) and "a western aversion to paradox" (J. R. Smith 8). Post-colonial discourses, in turn, often inadvertently or inexplicitly generalize Christian thought as a vaguely Manichean expression (or source?) of this dualism, as R. L. Stirrate's ethnography of Sinhalese Christians (93-55) and Sam Durrant's study of Wilson Harris's fiction (75) demonstrate. This scholarship raises vital, provocative questions—best saved for another project—regarding why Christian thought could so easily be confused (or confuse

itself) for religious and philosophical positions that have been "officially" renounced within a variety of

Christian traditions for millennia (see Hastings, "dualism"), and why antagonism between God and his

devil deformed into a dualism so intense post-colonial theorists often identify it, not the Christ paradox,

as the central preoccupation of Christian mythology. Third, as I will discuss in a moment, the Christ has

often been cast as a dour, sanctimonious guardian of order—sometimes, indeed, of colonial order (Keller,

Face of the Deep 6)—which curbs or obscures the Christ myth's trickster traits. The core narratives in my

study, however, present Christ figures or Christological themes in a manner that demonstrates a robust

and nuanced recognition that Christological paradoxes are tempting fruit for post-colonial literary

tricksters. Somewhat like notorious hackers Jonathan James and Adrian Lamo, who mastered the codes

they manipulated in their pursuit of digital troublemaking, or like successful criminals whose

understanding of the ins and outs of the laws they are evading outwit the designs of the legislators

themselves, Thomas King, Derek Walcott, Arundhati Roy, and Chigozie Obioma trouble colonial

Christians' claims to spiritual supremacy by artfully invoking the paradoxes of Christian mythology to

interrogate such claims.

My dissertation also demonstrates vital points of contiguity between post-colonial revivals of

trickster Christology and under-emphasized trickster discourse within classical and contemporary

Christian thought from the global North. Paradoxically, in challenging colonial Christianizing, the core

narratives in my study direct Christian thought to embrace its heritage more wholly. In case we assume

the deity of Christian mythology is too righteous to sink to tricksterism, consider Northrop Frye's

reminder about the Bible's witness to its deity's trickster affinities:

> What, for example, are we to do with a God who drowns the world in a fit of anger and repeoples
>
> it in a fit of remorse, promising never to do it again (Gen 9:11); a God who curses the ground
>
> Adam is forced to cultivate after his fall, but removes the curse after Noah makes a tremendous
>
> holocaust of animals, the smell of their burning flesh being grateful to his nose (Gen 8:21); a God
>
> who rejects Saul as king after he spares his enemy Agag out of human decency (because he
>
> should have been offered to God as a sacrifice) and inspires Samuel to hew Agag in pieces and

tell Saul that he has committed an unforgivable sin (1 Sam 15); a God who observes children

mocking the prophet Elisha and sends bears to eat up the children (2 Kgs 2:23), and so on? All

mythologies have a trickster God, and Jehovah's treatment of the Exodus Pharaoh (hardening his

heart), of Abraham, perhaps even of Job, shows clear trickster affinities. (*The Double Vision:*

Language and Meaning in Religion 74–75)

The deity Frye describes here finds a comfortable analogue in a deity who, driven by his appetite and

impatience—markers of a trickster (Hyers 184)—curses a fig tree for failing to produce fruit while it is

out of season (Mark 11:12-14). Although Frye does not fully work out the implications of reading the

Biblical God as a trickster, he certainly demonstrates that ignoring the Biblical God's more dodgy

decisions and actions requires considerable hermeneutic evasiveness.[26]

A more extended case for recognizing deception as a feature of the trickster deity within the

Biblical and patristic traditions has been made compellingly by Ray in *Deceiving the Devil* in which she

argues the incarnation represents the Biblical God's reliance on "cunning and creativity," on "surprise,

humor, play, and subterfuge" rather than "unilateral power" to "outsmart evil," to "overcome" and

"shatter" the "illusion of moral Manicheanism" (140). Marion Grau develops these themes richly in her

own work, especially her study of Gregory of Nyssa's "narrative of the *admirabile commercium* as a

trickster narrative. . . similar to Tertullian's amalgamated coin, as a currency that mediates between two

different economies [heavenly and earthly]" (Grau, "Divine Commerce: A Post-Colonial Christology "

172; Grau, *Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption* 217). Grau uses trickster discourse to interpret

"Christ as a shape-shifting trickster at the center of a crucial economic transaction in which an

entrepreneur God deceives the devil" (Grau, *Of Divine Economy* 136) a "sacred bricoleur" who patristic

traditions "are curiously intent on depicting as a clever economist rather than a brutal bully" (*Of Divine*

Economy: Refinancing Redemption 217), yet one that understands "divine trickery is in some measure

fraud and deception. . . a stealth investment that explodes the diabolic bank . . . and buys, or tricks,

redemption" (*Of Divine Economy* 159). To conclude this introductory chapter, consider but one

illustrative sample of post-colonial contiguity with strains of "conventional" Christology: on the one

hand, Jace Weaver documents the lamentable and seemingly irreconcilable differences between the humourless Christ myth of European colonizers and the frequently funny tricksters sacred to numerous Indigenous traditions; on the other hand, Weaver spins a deft apology for reading Jesus as a masterful trickster. Nimbly alluding to Jesus from John 10:10, Weaver reminds us that Jesus "came enjoying and proclaiming life, and that abundantly" (*Other Words* 257). Like a trickster, he indulged his appetites; he was a "wine bibber and a glutton" (Weaver, *Other Words* 257; see also Kidwell 125). Weaver intends this characterization as a generous compliment, one that will help "Whitestream Christians [who] acknowledge Jesus's healings and compassion" but stumble when trying "to revel in his humor and his passions" (*Other Words* 257).[27] If Christian mythology requires the continual intervention of hermeneutic conventions to harmonize its polyphonies into narratives, let alone doctrines, trickster discourses in the hands of post-colonial critics such as Grau and Weaver present a dissonant counterpoint to humourless hermeneutics that deny the Christ myth's humanity.

Chapter 2

A Tale of Two Tricksters:

The Christ and Coyote as Stranger and Friend

In Thomas King's *Green Grass Running Water*

1. Introduction

In my opening chapter, I outlined certain key paradoxes that have delimited and vivified the signification of the Christ myth across a range of Christian traditions. Principally enlisting key features from deconstructionist understandings of language, I contended that paradox, variously understood, has been a key mechanism of signification through which the Christ myth implicitly invokes the inversion of what it most explicitly evokes. The striking utility of this mechanism for post-colonial literary transfigurations, I suggested, could be appreciated by considering deconstructionist emphases on the eternal deferral of meaning and aporia that mediate signification (Bass xxviii). These emphases clarify why a by-design paradox such as the Christ myth manifests itself in highly volatile signifiers, which makes it a choice post-colonial literary device to engage and disrupt the often Manichean dichotomies and metonymies that characterize colonial rule. I paired this deconstructionist understanding of signification with central emphases in contemporary hermeneutic philosophy—on the contingency between consciousness, language, and history—to demonstrate that Christological paradoxes must be understood within their particular linguistic and historical contexts, or horizons of consciousness, by illustrating how renderings of the Christ myth that seem utterly paradoxical in one hermeneutic context may hardly seem so in another. Together, these observations about the dynamics of communication from deconstructionist and hermeneutic philosophical schools can help us appreciate why the "orthodox" Christ myth has been too culturally and politically promiscuous to remain comfortably domesticated within any culturally or politically circumscribed interpretation of it. The Christ myth can demand tricky signification, and that concern courses through King's novel and the remainder of this dissertation.

Set in the late twentieth century, *Green Grass Running Water* weaves several, seemingly

disconnected stories of characters associated with a Blackfoot community in Alberta, Canada. The central

tension in the novel concerns the building of an environmentally invasive dam that risks encroaching on

Indigenous land. The complications of this central tension course through the novel's several narrative

streams, introducing readers to characters who live in the community (such as Latisha Red Dog); a

character who has a sustained involvement with the community despite geographic distance (Alberta

Frank); characters who are journeying *to* the community from Florida (such as the four immortal Elders,

pursued by their warden and his assistant); and characters who have returned to the community to exploit

it (Charlie Looking Bear) or to protect it (Eli Stands Alone). Layered between these characters'

intersecting narratives, King's novel includes a series of stories that combines the Iroquois creation myth

of Sky Woman with canonical Western texts. These stories critically allude to action in the novel's

"realist" plane. Beyond these two narrative planes, *Green Grass Running Water* also includes short

chapters composed almost entirely of dialogue between trickster characters who straddle the novel's

narrative planes. Drawing on a range of trickster tropes and narrative modes, King's narration of

movement to or from the Blackfoot community negotiates paradoxes of familiarity and foreignness that

include Christological intonations of the Christ as both a friend and a stranger. King's novel culminates

when Eli Stands Alone's tenacious, trickster-worthy efforts to block the continued building of the dam—

efforts which ultimately involve his death—are zealously abetted the novel's other trickster figures.

Steeped in humour that can be as sensitive as it is stinging, *Green Grass Running Water* explores

paradoxes of post-colonial Indigeneity, including paradoxes with underappreciated Christological

inflections.

My contention is that the novel's hilarious treatment of Christian mythology has been widely read

only as a satire of Christian mythology, one that stigmatizes Christian mythology as irreconcilably other

to Indigenous traditions. Borrowing from critical insights offered mostly by contemporary

Indigenous/First Nations[28] theologians and writers, I argue that appreciating the complex roles humour

can play in Indigenous orientations towards the sacred can paradoxically render King's satirized Christ

myth a sacralized friend. The Christ myth proves particularly adept at being adapted for such humour,

principally because the paradoxical construction of the Christ myth allows it to occupy both identities,

stranger and friend, simultaneously. This paradoxical construction means relishing the novel's satirical

treatment of the Christ myth need not impede readers from appreciating that the hospitality the novel's

humour also extends to the Christ myth. The following discussion briefly orients the friend-stranger

paradox within wider Christian traditions, then proceeds to demonstrate how this novel blends this

paradox with paradoxical uses of laughter within several Indigenous traditions.

2.   Expository Strategies Engaging Paradoxes of the Christ as Stranger and Friend.

        2.1 Hospitality and Traditions of Hermeneutic Pluralism.

        Extending hospitality to the stranger is a prominent Biblical trope (Dunn 706; Richard 348).

Geoffrey William Bromily observes that in the New Testament, the term for hospitality, *philoxenia*, is

closely associated with *agape* (663)*,* one of the most frequent ways the New Testament qualifies the

nature of God's love for humanity, as well as the quality of love a Christian life should actualize. As

Gregory Jones puts it, "*agape* suggests that Christians ought to love without regard for mutuality, loving

even our enemies" (347). An exemplar of such love within teachings ascribed to Jesus would be the so-

called "good Samaritan"—cast in the parable as a stranger and a follower of a rival Abrahamic tradition

(Luke 10:25-37).[29] The Gospels repeatedly portray Jesus as a stranger or have him self-identify as such.

He is born far from home, not even in an inn (Luke 2:7), only to be a refugee in Egypt soon after

(Matthew 2:13-14). During his nomadic ministry he is ever the stranger depending on the hospitality of

others (Mark 1:29ff, 2:15ff). He identifies himself as a needy stranger (Mathew 25:35) and a thieving

stranger (Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39), as a wanderer who has "no place to lay his head" (Matthew

8:20).[30] He feels estranged from God, and therefore from the substance of his own being, when during his

crucifixion he questions why God has forsaken him (Matthew 27:46). After his resurrection, he appears in

the guise of a gardener to some (John 20:11-18) and as a mysterious fellow traveller to others (Luke

24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13).[31] The Christologically rich opening of John's Gospel even positions the Christ as stranger as central to his identity and to his story:

> He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. (John 1:10-11 KJV).

This motif gets carried across centuries, captured tidily in the opening couplet of a popular Presbyterian hymn, "Behold, a Stranger at the Door," penned in the mid-eighteenth century by Joseph Grigg:

> Behold a stranger at the door! He gently knocks, has knocked before
>
> Has waited long, is waiting still; You treat no other friend so ill. (254)

Considering the thick association between the Christ myth and strangers, contemporary theologians like Abraham van de Beek certainly have a broad range of "proof texts" to work with when positing that, "He is not God with us in general, but he is God with us as a stranger," which "implies that he is the God of the strangers" and that the Kingdom of God "is the kingdom of a Stranger to the world and therefore a strange kingdom" (256).

As closely as the Christ myth may be associated with the stranger, we cannot ignore the equally rich Christian traditions that cherish friendship and identify the Christ as a friend. Jesus describes his disciples as friends (Luke 12:4) and associates friendship with a high order of love: "Love each other as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. . . I have called you friends" (John 15:13-15 NRSV). Allusions to Abraham who was described as a friend of God (2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8) and to Moses who spoke with God "just as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11 KJV) suggest friendship is both the catalyst and goal through which the rag-tag group of disciples could enjoy the same relationship with God as did such revered figures within the Biblical tradition. All four Gospels recount the story of Jesus performing the role of host by feeding thousands of hungry followers. Where van de Beek works richly with the metaphor of Christ as stranger, Liz Carmichael presents an equally compelling interpretation of Christian love that works principally with the metaphor of Christ as friend. Carmichael traces linguistic innovations in the New Testament that

transform Hellenic understanding of friendship and love, along with the explicit elevation of friendship within the early patristic tradition, and contends that friendship found itself transformed by grace. God in Christ extended friendship to all human beings, and to be a "friend of sinners," hitherto a genuine insult or impossible paradox, now becomes thinkable and possible (Carmichael 39). Carmichael and van de Beek are not contradicting each other: they are demonstrating how these paradoxical identities—stranger and friend—assigned to the Christ myth in early Christian texts continue to interest twenty-first century theologians. Where Grigg in his hymn wrote, "let the heavenly Stranger in!" an equally popular Canadian hymn, written about a century later by Joseph Scriven, a Plymouth Brethren, opens declaring, "What a Friend we have in Jesus . . ." (133).

2.2 The Friend's Disguise as The Satirized Straw-Man Stranger.

Curiously, the intricate and complex narrative structure of *Green Grass Running Water* has widely been read as evidence of the novel's inhospitable orientation towards Christian mythology. King's novel has several central protagonists and includes at least seven, fully fleshed-out characters whose stories sometimes only loosely intersect, but upon whom the novel's wider narrative culmination depends. The novel borrows, bends and blends several trickster figures, the most recognizable being Coyote, popular in Indigenous orature and literature from across the Americas. Other tricksters include: the four "immortal" Elders—The Lone Ranger, Ishmael, Hawkeye, and Robinson Crusoe—who are redacted and hybridized figures from Iroquois and Blackfoot creation mythologies; Babo Jones, who is redacted from Herman Melville's "Cereno"; and GOD, who is redacted from Christian mythology. Successfully sustaining a readable narrative while distributing narrative action and tension over so many tricky and sometimes loosely connected characters itself demands masterful writing, but King intensifies his novel's involution by staging narrative action on various ontological planes (let's tentatively call them the "fantastical" and the "realist") which also intersect—sometimes distinctly, sometimes vaguely. As Patricia Linton observes, the different ontological status of the characters is reflected in the narrative by different structures of tense. Coyote and "I" always speak in the present tense. The narrator's accounts of

the human actions are reported in the present tense. The activities of the four Elders are sometimes in the past tense and sometimes in the present, depending on context. When the Elders interact with humans, the text records their speech in the past tense, like human activity. (221) Even these "structures of tense" contain variances. Sometimes the "I" identifies itself explicitly with the narrative perspective of the four Elders, as in Ishmael's case (King, *Green Grass Running Water* 105). Furthermore, dialogue by fantastical characters sometimes uses idiomatic conjugations such as "I says" (1, 38, 300) rather than the more standard "said" (49, 103,300), signaling a subtle shift in—and adding to—the possible narrative voices and variables at play.

To complicate the narrative structure further, the four Elders in the novel amicably compete for metanarrative ascendancy and authenticity: each tells a creation story; each wants to "get it right" (11); and each gives us clues they are aware their varying creation stories, shared in chapters stripped of realist settings, are connected to the narrative action set in the novel's more realist modes.[32] These stories, featuring First Woman, Changing Woman, Thought Woman or Old Woman, principally reshape Iroquois creation narratives, liberally blending them with allusions to Blackfoot narratives, the Bible, western pop culture and English canonical literature. Each creation narrative ends with the "fantastical" Woman incarnating into her particular story's "realist" narrator—one of the four immortal Elders—before being quickly incarcerated in the same prison as the other Elders. The absence of a singular narrator, the multiplicity of competing and complementary narrative voices, the frequent fusion of fantastical and realist narrative modes, the tricksters at every turn: these are just some of the features of the novel's rhapsodic polyphony.

Most scholarly criticism about the novel's treatment of Christian mythology novel considers this narrative complexity an affront to the Bible, one which others the Christ myth by parading the novel's differences to a foundational text of Christian mythology. Referencing Félix Guatttari and Gilles Deleuze, Jesus Benito Sanchez and Ana Maria Manzanas Calvo contend that, "In contrast to the Biblical story, closed, authoritative and linear," King's novel "deterritorializes itself" regularly (31), resists fettering itself to "hierarchical modes of communication," and encourages "an open . . . narrative space, not

striated, without a central authority" (32). Mark Pearson echoes this sentiment, singling out "particularly the Bible" (87) as a model for Western leanings towards linear narratives which King defies. Gundula Wilke helpfully surveys some of the major Biblical allusions King invokes, inverts and blends with Indigenous mythologies, and she not only concurs that the Bible contains a single narrative but contends it constitutes "*the* master-narrative of Western society" that "present[s] itself" as "the ideological framework for Christian discourse," "a universal story of absolute truth" responsible for establishing "Christian-patriarchal hierarchy" (83). Sharon Bailey argues that, "Even before the novel has begun, the authority of one of the most sacred books in Western culture is transformed into a joke and, it would seem, supplanted by the authority of the storytelling narrator and the trickster Coyote" (46)—and, indeed, that the novel "repeatedly identifies and ridicules the most basic Christian beliefs" (Bailey 47). Gundula Wilke recounts the many Biblical figures who are humorously transformed in King's novel—including Adam, Noah, Jesus, Jehovah, and the Archangel Gabriel—and in the spirit of similar critics posits this parody as a form of post-colonial, counter-Christian criticism (Wilke).[33] Similarly, commenting on King's short story, "One Good Story, That One" (which is as a kind of urtext for *Green Grass Running Water* in that it "parodies" the opening chapter of Genesis), Priscilla Walton reads the creation myths in Genesis as plainly hierarchical, presenting a "singular and exclusive truth," unlike the creation myths King presents which are more "indicative of the heteroglossia of Native American culture" (55).[34] All in all, this scholarship identifies critical differences between King's creation narratives and those in the Bible, and then presents these differentiations as post-colonial moves that satirize or otherwise affect a subversive diminution of an arch-canonical text.

Paradoxically, those familiar with the Bible may find themselves on strangely familiar ground when journeying through *Green Grass Running Water*. The heteroglossia of King's novel challenges "linear" readings of Biblical narratives by drawing attention to, if not sometimes mimicking, the maddening complexity of those narratives.[35] It demands a violently simplistic hermeneutic to render as "linear" the often paradoxical polyphony of a book that contains over sixty "books," written by multiple

authors, in multiple continents, in multiple languages, over thousands of years, containing multiple

creation narratives and four gospels whose variances and emphases can sometimes be quite difficult to

reconcile. Indigenous theologians Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley and George Tinker thoughtfully

recognize parallels between polyphony in Indigenous traditions and the Bible: when visiting an unnamed

"reservation community":

> . . . one of the authors asked one of the local storytellers if he would tell their creation story. The
>
> storyteller responded he was authorized to tell four versions. At least this Indian visitor did not try
>
> to ask, "Which one is the true version." As most Indians already know, the answer is that all them
>
> are true—in different ways and for different occasions. (49)[36]

The writers then assert that the "Bible is really no different than this story suggests about

American Indian oral traditions" (49), as they demonstrate the diversity of the Bible's creations

narratives. Furthermore, the order in which the Bible's texts are generally arranged rarely reflects the

chronology of their authorship, and even then the "linearity" of their arrangement hardly unfolds a

straightforward, chronologically linear narrative.[37] Even if we were to speak of *the* narrative of the Bible

in broad terms, the Bible's narrative orbit ends with a paradoxically terrifying revelation, restoration and

renovation of an original Genesis-like paradise, much as the narrative orbit of *Green Grass Running*

Water ends in a manner that presents some unsettling chiasmatic parallels and revisions of the novel's

opening (as I will illustrate in a moment). Furthermore, the assumed "universal truth" of the creation

narrative in Genesis 1, which King is lauded for subverting, has already been challenged within Biblical

studies: "The syntax of Genesis 1:1 can be taken either as a relative clause (i.e. the beginning of a specific

history to be narrated) or as an absolute clause (i.e. the beginning of creation)" (M. Horton 68). The very

features of the Bible that some critics argue King's novel taunts and teases may be sites where the texts

share considerable amity.

Consider further how the novel's remix of Biblical narratives (see Wilke) is a trick that the New

Testament regularly plays with the "Old." Some prominent examples include: the opening of John's

Gospel reworking of the opening of Genesis, lacing it liberally with Hellenic philosophical idioms such as *logos*; Revelation's reworking of eschatological imagery from Ezekiel, Daniel and the Psalms; imagery from Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) paralleling Hannah's rejoicing (I Samuel 2:1-10); Jesus proposing readings of the Biblical tradition that scandalized religious authorities of his time (Jesus in Mark 2:18-22 alluding to Isaiah 61:10); and Paul extending the idea of "messiah" by ironically associating it with titles, including "saviour" and "lord," that were explicitly assigned to Augustus (Rieger 31). Confronted with how different elements of Jewish scripture seemed after they had been Christianized, Origen referred to this process as "cooking" the "raw" truth of Jewish scriptures (Stroumsa 37), a symbolically charged transformation of states that Claude Levi-Strauss, in *The Raw and the Cooked*, argued could quite entice trickster figures (67, 136), as seems to have happened in the novel's transformation of Christian mythology (or in Christians' transformation of their Jewish heritage). Wryly playing tricks with the Bible in ways the Bible plays tricks with itself, the novel mocks and manipulates a number of Biblical narratives, using them in ways that may seem strange and scathingly satirical. Yet even in so doing, the novel's structure draws attention to a familiar prevalence of polyphonic narratives and heteroglossia within Indigenous *and* Biblical traditions.

By knocking Christian mythology off of its colonial perch, from whence this mythology demands exclusive obedience, *Green Grass Running Water* frees this mythology for inclusion within the novel's hybridized fellowship of mythologies. The novel treats Christian mythology quite as it treats other Indigenous mythologies, reworking and interweaving them with equal verve. Otherwise put, the Christ myth is granted recognition within *Green Grass Running Water* on many of the same terms that the novel recognizes other Indigenous mythologies. These terms may not be the terms that colonizing Christians demand, but they are terms that are generous within the novel's cultural context. But before we consider the license the novel takes with Christian mythologies, let us consider the license it takes with various Indigenous ones.

The story of a person falling out of the sky into water, as a moment in a wider creation narrative, has been widely circulated among Indigenous nations, but its origins—unlike most of the Indigenous characters in *Green Grass Running Water*— are not Blackfoot. As Lisa Brooks explains:

> Through its travel within Indigenous networks and its wide-reaching publication, the Haudenousaunee (Iroquois) story of Sky Woman has become one of the most widely known indigenous narratives of creation. Several Indigenous writers have published versions drawn from communal oral narratives, including John Norton (Cherokee/Mohawk), David Cusick (Tuscarora), Arther Parker (Seneca), and more recently, Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) and the combined effort by Joanne Shenandoah (Oneida) and Doug George (Mohawk). Cusick's version has even made it into the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Sky Woman may be one the most canonical Indigenous texts in our literary traditions. (238)

Its canonicity notwithstanding, the story of Sky Woman is quite different than traditional Blackfoot creation stories featuring "Old Man" who

> travels across Blackfoot territories, fixing up the world to its present form . . . First Woman and her son only come later in the story as the first human creations of Old Man. No one falls from the sky, and there is very little water. (S. M. Bailey 45)

The immortal Elders in *Green Grass Running Water* are of Southern Plains ancestry ("cousins" of the northern plains Blackfoot) and other than the appearance of a coyote or a spider trickster in some versions of their creation narratives, story-tellers like King exercise considerable literary license when creatively conflating Cheyenne, Kiowa, Comanche or Arapaho narratives with Iroquois and Blackfoot ones.

Indeed, we have no reason to believe that the Coyote of *Green Grass Running Water* is even the Coyote of Blackfoot creation narratives: "I" tells King's Coyote that Coyote is not unique, that "This world is full of Coyotes" (272); King's Coyote admits that he has "never been to Canada" (237), even though he disingenuously claims he was in Toronto while his dog/God dream was first running amuck (68) and in Kamloops when the immaculate conception took place (416). His role in the destruction of the

Grand Baleen Dam at the novel's conclusion has much stronger narrative parallels in coyote trickster

narratives from entirely different geographies:

> When the Coyote-trickster of the Upper Columbian mythology broke the dam which Frog was
>
> hoarding all the water and fish in a private lake, the water and fish were released, but a flood, and
>
> all subsequent potential for flooding, came along with the destruction of the dam. (Hyers 185)

Perhaps King's Coyote evinces the increased migration of Indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central

America to North America, "where the most spoken Indian language in the United States is now

Zapoteca" (Kidwell et al. 180). As Weaver reminds us, migration, displacement and exile—being

strangers—have so long been realities of Indigenous life that many Indigenous communities can fairly be

characterized as "diasporic" and "hybridized": terms that have received considerable critical attention in

post-colonial studies (Weaver, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics." 14–15). If "hybridity

intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its identity but to

represent the unpredictability of its presence" (Bhabha 163), King affects a post-colonial reworking of

Indigenous narratives as well as Biblical ones.[38] Offence to the latter assumes a hermeneutic fixity to

which Indigenous readings of Christian mythology must conform; respect for the latter appreciates that

Green Grass Running Water treats Biblical narratives much like it treats other sacred Indigenous

narratives.

2.3 The Hermeneutics of Holy Humour

A closer look at some of the ways humour functions across many Indigenous traditions may also

allow us to read the humour of *Green Grass Running Water* as not merely satirizing and alienating, but

also paradoxically as sacralizing and inviting. Before considering the role humour may play in Indigenous

traditions, let us briefly consider the role humour has played in Christian traditions, for this consideration

may help explain why the novel is read as simply satirizing Christian mythology. Reading *Green Grass*

Running Water as a straightforward satire somewhat fairly assumes that the Christ myth does not lend

itself well to humour, since Christian traditions have rarely considered laughing at the sacred appropriate.

True, one can hunt and peck through the history of Christianity to find some notable exceptions to this tendency, including Eastern traditions of "holy fools" stretching from sixth century Byzantium to modern Russia (Stroumsa 229); "the long tradition of *risus paschalis,* 'Easter Laughter', where preachers in German-speaking countries presented the Easter story as amusingly as they could" (Pyper, "Humour" 315);the presentation of Jesus as a trickster in late medieval English drama (Ishi 20); and of course Carnival celebrations.[39]

These examples of "Christian humour" notwithstanding, Hugh Pyper provides a wealth of evidence regarding "the neglect that the fundamental human experience of laughter has suffered in Christian thought," starting from the fact that "Jesus is never recorded as having laughed and neither is anyone in the New Testament" ("humour" 314). As Mathias George Guenther notes in his characterization of colonial Christian resistance to identifying the Christ with laughter or tricksterism:

> [I]t is unthinkable . . . to countenance any association, let alone merger, of Jesus Christ with trickster . . . because of the serenity, asceticism, and "blessed seriousness" (H.M. Rahner 38) that constitute the religious style and sentiment of mainstream Christians . . . [in] a religion where "the very possibility of God laughing" is already a blasphemy (Zukcer: 1967: 316), and where God is seen as the grand architect of order and structure, there is little room for tricksters. (121)

In light of these longstanding hostilities to humour within Christian traditions, one can appreciate why *Green Grass Running Water* may be read as evidence that Coyote and Christ belong to irreconcilable mythologies, and why laughter directed at the latter may turn it only into an object of ridicule, estrangement. Nevertheless, reading the novel's jokes on and about Christian tradition only as a satire, only as a diminishment, assumes a relationship between laughter and the sacred that is itself circumscribed by much Christian tradition. The paradox of considering this same, satirizing humour as also a gesture of hospitality begins to emerge when we consider a few Indigenous perspectives on humour.

The vital role of laughter has been recognized in sacred rituals of a number of Indigenous nations, including the Lakota (Peterson 35), the Pueblo and the Cherokee (Johansen 200) and others (see Giago).

The wide and complex role humour plays across Indigenous traditions can be attested to in part by the range of lively debate across Indigenous studies regarding its origins, transformations, and its multiple dimensions and intertwined functions—social, sacred, and survivalist (Gruber 9-10). I need not embroil this chapter in this debate to recognize that, in Indigenous art, presenting Christian mythology as the subject of laughter need not be interpreted exclusively, or even principally, as dismissive derision. Laughter can be valued as a form of veneration. For context, consider briefly how this technique surfaces in other Indigenous writing. Tomson Highway, in an opening note to his play, *The Rez Sisters*, states the "the 'Trickster' [is] as pivotal and important figure in the Indigenous world as Christ is in the realm of Christian mythology"[40] (*The Rez Sisters* xii). Highway's comparison of the Trickster to Christ, in terms of "importance," emphasizes why no sacrilege is committed when the play's Marie-Adele, upon recognizing the play's bird-like Anishinabe trickster, tells him:

"Go Away! You stinking thing! Don't come messing around here for nothing! . . . Who the hell

do you think you are, the Holy Spirit? . . . Will you stop shitting all over the place" (19).

In Drew Hayden Taylor's novel, *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass*, John Tanner, a mysterious, tall, blond, gorgeous stranger arrives in a sleepy Anishinabe community and is suspected by some, for good reason, of being Nanabush. When confronted, he responds in a passage that amusingly harkens Jesus's questioning of Peter and Peter's response in Mark 8:28 –

"Who am I?" John said tauntingly.

"Nanabush," said Wayne.

For a second John didn't respond; he just stared at Wayne with quiet amusement. "Nanabush. The

Trickster? The central character of Anishnawbe mythology, the paramount metaphor in their

cosmology? The demigod? The amazing, the handsome, intelligent and fabulous Nanabush? That

Nanabush?" John noticed Virgil was nodding behind Wayne.

"Well, that's a little egocentric, but essentially, yes," said Wayne.

"What about you, Virgil? What do you say?" (293)

Taylor's beautifully ambiguous trickster blends Biblical allusions, anthropological discourses and unabashed fawning to quickly riff a definition that humorously demonstrates studied familiarity with what he vaguely denies being. In part, John's silver-tongued humour strongly suggests his possible personage as a sacred trickster. Or as Sherman Alexie puts the paradox of laughter in various Indigenous spiritualities, even a rite as sacred as a funeral, especially a funeral for a figure as revered as a grandmother, invites laughter *because* it is sacred:

> When it comes to death, we know that laughter and tears are pretty much the same thing.
> And so, laughing and crying, we said good-bye to my grandmother. . . All of us laughed when
> they lowered my grandmother into the ground. And all of us laughed when they covered her with
> dirt. And all of us laughed as we walked and drove and rode our way back to our lonely, lonely
> houses. (*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* 166–67)

Black Elk, the early twentieth century Lakota Roman Catholic catechist who believed he had encountered Christ in his vision of the Ghost Dance, noted:

> You have noticed that truth comes into this world with two faces. One is sad with suffering, the
> other laughs, but it is the same face. (in Neihardt 149)

So Christian mythology presented humorously in Indigenous writing may read as an expression of hermeneutic hospitality that speaks of the Christ myth in the same sacred tones with which Nanabush and other tricksters or sacred figures are engaged.

Other instances of this trope abound in Indigenous traditions. Pueblo anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz, commenting on how a Hopi clown had dawned an afro wig and mimicked Jesse Jackson's speech after Jackson had addressed them, concluded that "if the clown became a permanent part of future Hopi ceremonies, it would mean that Jackson was an influence on the culture. If not, the Hopi had dismissed him" (Kidwell et al. 97). Similarly, as "the Sioux describe Iktomi, he may be mischievous and ribald, but he is nonetheless *wakan*, holy" (Kidwell et al. 118). Humorist Darrell Dennis very effectively demonstrates this orientation towards humour and the sacred in "Jesus vs. Nanabush," a radio documentary on contemporary Indigenous religions in Canada. Integrated into the work is a sketch in

which Jesus and Nanabush sit down for a drink, meeting like old friends. Dennis represents Jesus in the same respectful way he represents Nanabush: as a humorous caricature.[41] Intimations of similar humour, in which Christian mythology is sacralized through laughter and association with Indigenous culture, can be heard in Alexie's *Smoke Signals:* Thomas Builds-a-Fire, a central character, describes his friend's mother's fry bread as being "so good they use it for Communion back home" and another character's fry bread as "Jesus fry bread, enit? Fry bread that can walk across water. Fry bread rising from the dead" (*Smoke Signals* 74). The image of bread walking on water and rising from the dead is funny because it unconventionally blends conventional Christological imagery—therefore rendering it strange—even as it embraces the imagery by associating it intimately with something entirely familiar: fry bread.[42]

One of the most poignant ways *Green Grass Running Water* uses such paradoxically sacralizing satire is its affiliation of the Christ myth with tricksterism. Before discussing how the novel characterizes Christian descriptions of divinity as tricksters, a brief visit to another setting in the novel, one full of trickery, one designed for strangers to visit, provides concise insights into how the novel presents the Christ paradox as both stranger and friend. One of King's central characters, Latisha Red Dog, owns a successful eatery in Blossom, the Blackfoot community in which much of the novel is set, called the "Dead Dog Café"—"a nice local establishment with a loyal but small clientele *and* a tourist trap" (108)— the eatery serves meat dishes that everyone, except tourists, know are made from beef. Tourists believe Latisha's unflappable claims that they are being served varieties of dog, which she pretends is traditional Blackfoot cuisine, protected under treaty rights that can be extended to tourists in a menu featuring "Dog du Jour, Houndburgers, Puppy Potpourri, Hot Dogs, Saint Bernard Melts" (109). In the Dead Dog Café, we witness a skeptical ex-RCMP officer whose prejudices erode his sensible doubts that Latisha serves dog meat (111). We encounter politely enthusiastic tourists who are caricatures of non-Indigenous Canadian literary giants famous for writing about Indigenous peoples (Andrews et al. 90). We cringe at tourists who do not know dog-eating was never part of Blackfoot culture, who do not know that there never was such a treaty right, or that even if there were it would demand laughable naiveté to believe

treaty rights are as inviolable as Latisha casually presents them to be.[43] Latisha takes entrepreneurial

advantage of Tzvetan Todorov's oft-quoted insight that satisfying an appetite for ignorance, not

knowledge, is the "constitutive paradox" (265) in desires for "exotic" Otherness. Latisha's variety of

hospitality confirms her "strangeness" to strangers, even though she is serving something entirely

familiar—beef—to those hungry for something foreign. To borrow Sara's Suleri's clever pairing of

"familiar" and "exotic," Latisha understands that an "indiscriminate reliance on the centrality of otherness

tends to replicate what in the context of imperialist discourse was the familiar category of the exotic"

(12).

It is hardly surprising that The Dead Dog Café, a place where strangers become stranger by being

invited to eat something secretly familiar, is the locale so closely associated with presenting the divinity

of Christian mythology as a trickster. The name of the cafe is related to the opening of the novel, whose

fantastical mode is signaled (not for the last time) by King's minimalist if not absent descriptions of

things physical, be they settings or characters. The novel opens with Coyote having a dream so lively it

becomes its own person whose immediate urge is to assert, "I *am* in charge of the world" (2) and to want

to *be* Coyote. It settles for being something close to a coyote, a dog, but "when that Coyote Dream thinks

about being a dog, it gets everything mixed up. It gets everything backward" (2). The dog thinks it's a

god, and then insists on being promoted from "a little god" to "GOD" (2). The character also "gets

everything backwards" from a Biblical standpoint, in that he eerily evokes the Biblical Anti-Christ's

desire to mimic and assume God's titles and powers (Keller, *God and Power* 39). Overall, King's tricks

sufficiently dizzy us enough with this dog/god confusion that the Dead Dog Café can easily be read as the

"Dead God Café." Allusions to Nietzsche—who accused Christianity of being "the one great curse, the

one great intrinsic depravity . . . the one immortal blemish of mankind" (Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ* 91)—

do not stop here: the four narratives of the immortal Elders are introduced like the four Gospels, similar to

the "mock Gospel style" (Fraser 29) of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.[44] Nietzsche's emphasis on

laughter in that text—"Zarathustra crowns himself with holy laughter, and in his exhortation to the 'higher

men' he bursts forth with the . . . imperative: 'You higher men, *learn* to laugh!'" (Gotz 107)—parallels

the measure of awe that humour is granted in *Green Grass Running Water,* as I will discuss in a moment.

When Coyote swears to the character "I" that he has told the truth, "I" scolds him by mimicking

Nietzsche's celebrated apothegm, "There are no facts, only interpretations" (Nietzsche, *Will To Power*

267): "There are no truths . . . Only stories" (391). Subtly invoking such a famously sententious critic of

Christianity lures us, somewhat like the beef-eating tourists in Latisha's restaurant, into believing we are

savouring King's boundary-breaking, counter-Christian, non-linear, "tradition"-informed, polyphonic

trickster myths—all very "exotic"—when what we are being served has a suspicious semblance to the

sanguine deity Christians have been eating for centuries.

      King's character, GOD, has been widely read as a scathing satire of the Christian deity, but there

is something familiar about this strange character. Earlier, I noted that GOD mimics and wants to be

Coyote. As Hyde observes, however, the coyote trickster has traditionally been associated with mimicry,

with working his tricks through imitation, *not* with progenation (42). In Blackfoot creation narratives,

Coyote usually "participates" in Old Man's designs for creation by imitating and interrupting Old Man's

efforts. In *Green Grass Running Water* it is not only "that GOD" who gets everything backwards, for

Coyote's traditional characterization also seems reversed.[45] "That GOD," the dream deity who mimeos

and mirrors King's Coyote, is identified by the character "I" as a trouble-maker long before Coyote is

identified as such (2). When Coyote's dog/GOD dream makes his appearance in the novel's first portrait

of an Eden-like garden, made by First Woman, GOD is an agent of disorder: "Oh oh, says First Woman

when she sees that GOD land in her garden. Just when we were getting things organized" (41). The

dog/GOD trickster's emergence from Coyote's dream is also curious, for as Tomson Highway notes,

"The *dream* world of North American Indian mythology is inhabited by the most fantastic creatures. . .

Foremost among these beings is the 'Trickster'" (*Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* 10). In *Green*

Grass Running Water, *only* the trickster dog/GOD explicitly belongs to the "dream world."

      The conflation or ambiguity between Coyote and God is perhaps most enchanting when Coyote

grants Alberta Frank an inexplicable pregnancy to which the immortal Elders object— "You remember

the last time you did that? . . .We haven't straightened out *that* mess yet" (416)—and to which Coyote

responds with only a mischievous, "Hee-hee" (416). Sometimes the conflations between Coyote and his

dog/GOD dream are vague and fleeting, but nevertheless haunting: one of the few times Coyote seems

dimly discernable to a character in the novel's realist realm happens when he confesses to dancing, again

to the ire of the immortal Elders (409), not long after Lionel Red Dog vaguely notices the puzzling sight

of "a yellow *dog* dancing in the rain" (279, emphasis mine). The ability to shape-shift, widely associated

with tricksters in Indigenous cosmologies (Highway, *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* 10; Kidwell

et al. 89) is a skill King grants that dog/GOD dream overtly and subtly. Overtly, in Lone Ranger's

creation story, the pouty and petty GOD decides to remain in his abundant, Eden-like garden while

"missing all the fun" (71) outside; we never encounter him explicitly again in the novel, although he

appears in shapeshifted form as some of the more sinister-but-ridiculous masculine characters of

Ishmael's creation stories (147,196), and perhaps once in Robinson Crusoe's (294). More subtly, lest we

hastily cast GOD as a villain, note that although GOD never speaks explicitly as GOD after confining

himself to his garden, Coyote's voice begins to take on the distinctly excitable, questioning and

troublemaking tone of GOD's voice from earlier in the novel. The Coyote in the opening of the novel,

who tells the uppity GOD to relax and watch some television, sounds much more like the similarly

mellow character of Old Coyote who makes a number of cameos later in the novel, almost always

speaking in the easy, chilled tones of the novel's earlier Coyote.

3. Culmination and Conclusion: The Christology of Coyote's Dreamy Linguistic Tricks and The
    Paradoxes of Eli Stands Alone

    As the conclusion of *Green Grass Running Water* approaches, Coyote appears to return to using

mimicry as his preferred method of tricksterism, but even here readings of mimicry operate quite

differently in their overt and subtle modes. Overtly, Coyote's arrival in Blackfoot territory is heralded by

three water-bound cars whose names—a Nissan, a Pinto, and a Karmann-Ghia—mimic the ships that

heralded the arrival of the colonizer's God in the Americas: the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria. More

subtly, in the novel's final page, Coyote asks the narrator, the unidentified "I," the *same* question that GOD asks Coyote in the opening passage of the novel—"Where did all that water come from?" (3, 431). Coyote even responds to the suggestion that he "sit down" in the *same* way GOD responded to Coyote's initial suggestion to sit down: "But there is water everywhere" (3, 431). Paul Russe, citing Carlton Smith (61), contends that the concept of Indigenous tricksters as "embodied beings" remains "an enduring fantasy of Western scholars" that is "in part emblematic of a western humanistic desire to embody trickster in a humanizing rhetoric of presence" (Russe 203). King answers back here by presenting the relationship between Coyote and his dog/GOD dream in terms that could well be classically Christological: far from simply mocking the Christian deity, King exalts the Christian deity by associating him with Coyote so intimately that King's characterizations evoke conjectures on the distribution of common being between distinct persons. In Christian mythological terms, Coyote and his dog/GOD dream enjoy a type of hypostatic union, a kind of perichoresis or "mutual interiority" in Miroslav Volf's rendering of the term (128), which allows a trickster figure to be spoken of as an embodied person without limiting the range of the figure's "being" to its embodiment or even to a particular personhood.

Kidwell, Noley and Tinker similarly use classical Christological thinking to explain how paradox overcomes dualism in Indigenous mythologies. Finding "God" inadequate, they rely on the Osage title, "Wakonda," and contend that

> American Indian dualism is a necessary reciprocity, not oppositional. They are different manifestations of the same Wakonda, not of two Wakonda even though they carry personality specificity just as traditional Christian Trinitarian doctrine would assert. (46)

Green Grass Running Water achieves this reciprocal union in a trickster's terms: Coyote mimics that which mimics him (his dog/GOD dream) until their identities are whirling in a circuit of humour-fueled mutual mimicry. Homi Bhabha insightfully observes that such instances of "colonial doubling" represent a "strategic displacement of value through a metonymy of presence . . . represented in its enigmatic, inappropriate signifiers" such as "stereotypes, jokes, multiple and contradictory beliefs, the 'native' Bible" (172). According to Bhabha, "colonial doubling" fuels a "metonymic strategy" of "*mimicry*" that

is "at once a mode of appropriation and resistance" (172-173, emphasis in original). In King's novel, this appropriation and resistance also represents a remarkably flattering act of approbation and kindness, for that caustic dog/GOD dream is awarded an affinity with (if not metonymically elevated to the status of) a figure, Coyote, who enjoys sacred currency across several Indigenous traditions.

Green Grass Running Water, however, leaves open the possibility for affinity to remain unreciprocated, if not unrecognized. If that dog/GOD dream presents the deity of Christian mythology as the agent of trickery, consider the cautionary tale of this deity's correlative character in the novel's more realist vein, Dr. Joe Hovaugh (orally, Jehovah). Dr. Hovaugh is a dupe trickster, a worthy victim of his own foolishness whose attachment to pyrrhic power retards the possibility of friendship with the novel's immortal Elders. Dr. Hovaugh, quite like Coyote's dream, gets "everything backwards" (or, at least, a great deal backwards). Dr. Hovaugh has the dubious distinction of overseeing the Fort Marion sanatorium (the one which happens to house the immortal Elders) and invites easy comparisons between God's omniscience in Christian mythology and the jailer's desire for perfect surveillance in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (201, 214). Dr. Hovaugh has kept detailed records about the immortal Elders' impossibly long residency at the Fort Marion complex. His records include dates of the Elders' disappearances, many of which correlate to well-known natural disasters, many which correlate to seemingly nothing, but Dr. Hovaugh remains haunted by suspicions that there may be more to these figures than meets the realist eye. For Foucault, omniscience entails omnipotence (insofar as knowledge entails power), but Dr. Hovaugh is too impotent, too ignorant, and too prone to getting things backwards to be anything so ominous.

When we meet Dr. Hovaugh early in *Green Grass Running Water*, he is not creating a garden, let alone life. While sitting behind his "colonial woodcraft" desk that pleasantly reminded him of the death "of a tree cut down to the stump" (16), Dr. Hovaugh

> had of late cultivated the habit of . . . staring out the window onto the grounds of the hospital. . .
> There was no harm in it.

> . . . Dr. Hovaugh sat in his chair behind his desk and looked out at the wall and the trees and the flowers and the swans on the blue-green pond in the garden, *and he was pleased.* (16, emphasis mine)

Alluding to the Biblical God's pleasure with his creation (Genesis 1:31), King further adumbrates the deity of Christian traditions even as he works it over with heavy ironies: Dr. Hovaugh "cultivates" pleasure from surveying life while sitting behind a desk as heavy as death; and he envisions his prison as a paradise as he ponders adding a "a pair of peacocks" (17). Later in the novel, when telling the story of his family's history in North America, Dr. Hovaugh's account inverts the opening verses of Genesis 1: " . . . in the beginning all this was land. Empty land" (95). When Coyote and his dog/GOD dream note the presence of water everywhere, they are referencing Genesis 1, in which water is explicitly co-eternal with God despite widespread Abrahamic doctrines of creation *ex nihilo.* For Dr. Hovaugh, the empty land waits like the "void" in Genesis 1, and the presence of water gets overlooked like the presence of Indigenous peoples. Despite his name, institutional title, and associations with Coyote, Dr. Hovaugh has little influence over the immortal Elders. When told that the immortal Elders have once again escaped, which they do at will before voluntarily returning, he "seemed to shrink behind the desk as though it were growing, slowing and imperceptibly enveloping the man" (17). Dr. Hovaugh pursues the Elders from Florida to Alberta accompanied by Babo Jones, a caregiver at the sanatorium who had genuinely befriended the Elders, for despite Dr. Hovaugh's troubled fascination with these mysterious characters, he never befriends those whom he naively considers his wards. When the Elders return to the Fort Marion sanatorium, they tell Babo that they have been on a mission to fix a part of the world and now that they are back home they might try to help Dr. Hovaugh next. On the one hand, reminiscent of Coyote's dog/GOD dream's demands for power, this "Jehovah" has already been "fixed" insofar as his colonial powers have been neutered.[46] On the other hand, Dr. Hovaugh, the cautionary dupe trickster, demonstrates how attempts towards inclusion, embrace and friendship can be thwarted by lingering colonial arrogance.

The most distinct Christ figure in *Green Grass Running Water* is Eli Stands Alone, a retired Professor Emeritus of Literature from the internationally lauded University of Toronto. He is, paradoxically, both the agent and target of trickery, and the trickery Eli is involved in is earth-shattering. A hermeneutic clue to Eli's character can be found in his fantastical analogue, Young Man Walking On Water. We encounter Young Man Walking On Water in Hawkeye's telling of creation, a responsibility Hawkeye has generously decided to share with Coyote (328). Coyote wants to include a golden calf, a pillar of salt and a burning bush in his narrative, all which Hawkeye (or "I") rejects (349). In the subsequent narrative, Young Man Walking On Water fails to walk on water, fails to calm the waves, and refuses the help of Old Woman, who does actually manage to calm the waves not by commanding them but by singing to them. Old Woman chastises Young Man, telling him that he is "acting as though you have no relations" (351)—a maxim which emphasizes the need to remember one's kinship with the rest of creation (Kidwell, Noley and Tinker 40). Young Man Walking On Water's arrogance is matched by his impotence: his desire to save his scared "disciples" (they are never named explicitly as such) is driven by desire for self-aggrandizement over concern for their safety. Even Coyote is taken aback by the tactic to win followers:

"That's a really good trick," says Coyote.

"Yes," I says. "No wonder this world is a mess." (350)

It's tempting to read King's portrait of this "Christ" as flatly unflattering, but this portrait seems consistent with, if not gentler than, the Christ of conquering Christians.[47] What makes Young Man Walking On Water fascinating is the manner in which King transforms that character's aggressive rules— "no one is allowed to be in two places at once. Except me" (350)—into kindred qualities that can shape and trouble a highly sympathetic reading of Eli's paradoxes.

Like Young Man Walking On Water, who works by himself, Eli stands alone against the opening of the Grand Baleen Dam. Returned from Toronto to live in his mother's house, now at the foot of the dam, Eli alone has the tenacity, capacity for considerable isolation, and understanding of Canadian

institutional powers to have leveraged his fragile treaty rights to stall the dam's opening for ten years.[48]

Like dams in India (A. Roy, *The Algegbra of Infinite Justice* 175) , dams built in Canada notoriously exploit indigenous communities and the environment in an on-going, centuries-old colonial encroachment (King, *Green Grass Running Water*, 118). Eli dines with "tax collectors" in that he regularly, almost ritually, has coffee with Clifford Sifton, the builder of the Dam who tirelessly pressures Eli to change his mind (111, 138). He is twice instrumental in cleansing the Sun Dance of a photographer (139, 385), evoking Jesus's clearing the temple of those who wish to commodify the sacred (Mark 11:15-19, 27-33). We hear much about Eli's mother but his father is never spoken of. Like Young Man Walking on Water, Eli has no control over water: when the dam breaks, thanks to Coyote's machinations, Eli drowns. Eli compares the Dam to a toilet (136), and when it cannot withstand Coyote's dam-shattering dance Eli is flushed away like so much excreta, again evoking the abjection associated with crucifixion before Christians slyly inverted an object of humiliation into an ornament. Eli's body is never found, and he enjoys a kind of resurrection as the logs from his mother's cabin, which his mother constructed herself, are found and reconstructed by Eli's relatives. Eli's death and resurrection ward off the completion of the Dam and the artificial, aptly named "Parliament Lake" it was to create.[49]

Perhaps Eli's most salient semblance to the Christ myth, however, stirs in his desire as an assimilated, "native intellectual" to overcome an identity based on Manichean dualisms—represented in *Green Grass Running Water* as Cowboys vs. Indians kitsch film and fiction—and embrace an identity that accommodates a more nuanced, seemingly paradoxical encounter between difficult differences. Before we meet Eli, we hear him described by his sister, Norma, while she is addressing Lionel:

> "Eli went to university . . . graduated [with] a Ph.D. . . . Used to dress up . . . polish his shoes so you see the sky when you looked down." . . .
>
> . . .
>
> "Your uncle wanted to be a white man." (37)

White men, to Norma, are made in the image of a deity who gets everything backwards in that they look at their shoes to see the sky. Frantz Fanon describes the desire to be the image of one's colonizer as something indicative of a pathological colonial drive (*The Wretched of the Earth* 60,125; *Black Skin, White Masks* 44, 45, 66). Eli attempts to go the "full Fanon," so to speak, in that he marries a white woman. Eli's lover and eventual spouse, Karen, genuinely loves Eli even though her affections are laced with the same strain of racism that makes Latisha's restaurant popular. Karen's intellectual fascination with things Indigenous excises itself as erotic desire for Eli, even to the point where she urges him to return to the Sun Dance which, upon first seeing, she exclaims, "It's like it's right out of a movie," and "It's like going back in time" (203).

Despite being received warmly by Eli's family, Karen claims that what she will remember is, "All those tepees," whereas What Eli remembered were the people" (261). Fanon's anxieties about assimilation, however, somewhat differently riddle Indigenous engagements with "race," as Kidwell, Noley and Tinker contextualize:

> One oddly common view held by Whites is that Native Americans have an opportunity not available to African Americans or Asian Americans or many other ethnic minorities: they can simply give up their culture and "become White." Amer-Europeans . . . do not understand why Natives would not want to take advantage of such an "opportunity." (168-169)

In a Canadian context, amendments to the Indian Act in 1880 made this "opportunity" a legal reality: one could lose one's "status" if one became a lawyer, professor or cleric (among other things) (King, *On Stories And The Native Canadian Experience*.). Although the Indian Act would rework these amendments, the tenacious logic behind their origins surfaces in an exchange between Clifford and Eli. "[Y]ou guys aren't real Indians anyway," Clifton charges Eli; "Look at you. You're a university professor." To which Eli responds, "That's my profession. Being Indian isn't a profession" (141). Despite Eli's clarity with Clifford, perhaps there was a time when Eli *would* have accepted Clifford's argument. After all, he had spent most of his life trying to fulfil it, remaining in Toronto for decades without bothering to visit Blossom or remain in touch with kin, all the while building a successful academic career

studying and teaching high Western culture: "A book on William Shakespeare. Another on Francis Bacon. Teacher of the Year. Twice" (262).

Eli, however, was acting as if he had "no relations," which according to King is a "common admonishment" variously translated among Indigenous communities (King, "Introduction" ix). To act as if one has "no relations" suggests much more than ignoring immediate family. As King explains, the term "all my relations" within Indigenous cosmologies extends the "web of kinship . . . to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be imagined" ("Introduction" ix). Therefore, when Eli behaves as if he has "no relations" he signals a *cosmic* estrangement from his "responsibilities" upon which hinge *socially* manifested possibilities of pursuing a "harmonious" and "moral" life (King, "Introduction" ix). When Norma contacts him to inform him of their mother's death, she explicitly inquires if Eli, having now "become" white, might leverage his new ethno-racial status in order to get a good price for the house: "I hear that if you're a famous enough white guy, the government will buy the house where you were born and turn it into one of those tourist things" (113). Norma, like Clifford, casually assumes that Eli has crossed a Manichean divide, one that allows him (and possibly others around him) to believe he would no longer be colonized if he chose to be like his colonizer. To pursue such assimilation is to play the role of trickster—deceiving others, if not yourself, into passing as what you are not—*and* the role of the trickster's victim: believing that heritage must be bartered for acceptance. Fanon claims Native intellectuals can be easily goaded into such trickery (*The Wretched of the Earth* 60, 124), but part of the paradox at play here is that like Fanon, Eli migrated to his respective colonial centre and achieved heights of professional achievement in western arts before returning to serve as a vanguard in anti-colonial struggle. Such was the case with some "turn of the century . . . Native intellectuals, products of Indian boarding schools. . . mixed bloods by either blood or culture" (Bell 62) who, having survived the experience, "wrote about and advocated indigenous rights" from "this middle space . . . evinced in their interchangeable use of White and Indian names" (Bell 62).[50] Some of their work "both confounds and conflates assimilation and resistance" (Bell 62), much like Eli's character does. On the one hand, Eli is the trickster shapeshifter who "becomes" a white man, mastering the arts of colonial masters to twist them

for anti-colonial purposes. On the other hand, paradoxically, Eli is also the victim of Coyote's trickery, dying with the indignity of shit being flushed.[51]

The novel gives us no reason to believe Eli was violently exiled from his community, badly treated by Karen or her family (despite their clumsiness when discussing Eli's heritage), or professionally denied due honours. Nevertheless, cradled in Eli's pursuit of whiteness was a misplaced pursuit of personhood. This view had roots in the original Indian Act which distinctly differentiated between "person" and Indian,[52] suggesting that the only way to achieve one's personhood was to shed one's non-European heritage. Pyper reminds us that while the idea of personhood has a range of contemporary psychological and legal meanings, its origins lie in Christological attempts to explain paradoxical distinctions within the Trinity ("Person" 532). The notion of a person being fully Indigenous and "westernized," as Eli is, remained as befuddling a possibility to the framers of the Indian Act as the notion of a person simultaneously being a stranger and a friend. Yet that paradox is realized in Eli: both Europeanized and Indigenous, trickster and tricked, stranger in life and friend in death. Almost from the moment the novel introduces Eli to us, we find him reading a piece of cowboys-and-Indians pulp fiction, *The Mysterious Warrior*. Eli's novel features a white woman, captured by an Indigenous warrior who treats her with love and respect. The reciprocation of the captive woman's admiration transforms the warrior into a figure who is simultaneously noble, dangerous, and tragic enough to illicit readers' sympathy, even as they savour his formulaic demise. The warrior will be killed at the hands of white men who rescue the white woman, bring her back to her senses, and reintroduce a Manichean order which the novel only tests and teases to titillate its reader.[53] At first, Eli playfully relates to the novel's protagonist, Iron Eyes, seeing a part of his own story in the kitsch fiction. But Eli's story is much more complex: no Manichean order is restored at the end of *Green Grass Running Water*. Instead, we are left wrestling with the paradox of the trickster's theodicy.

The power of King's post-colonial critique can be amped in a reading that recognizes the paradoxes at play in the novel's hospitable treatment of the Christ myth. Edward Said observed that "the

history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowing" (217), that "resistance" to imperialism is not "merely a reaction to imperialism" but a search for an alternative model of ethical cultural exchange, an "alternative way of conceiving human history" heavily dependent on challenging "the barriers between cultures" (216). Unlike brutally crude literary and cinematic appropriations of "the Indigenous"—a central theme of the novel—King's transposition of Christian mythology can be read as a critical gesture of respect, an informed and insightful exemplar of cultural exchange and engagement that, in Musa Dube's definition of post-colonialism's highest end, "proposes many different ways to co-exist on earth without having to suppress and exploit each other" (3). Much scholarship reads King's allusions to Christian mythology as purely antagonistic, branding it foreign, but an attentive reading of these allusions evinces subtle, nuanced understandings of the paradoxes in which Biblical hermeneutics and Christology remain familiarly enmeshed. King's tricksters, in emphasizing paradoxes that trouble dualisms stand shoulder to shoulder with Christian thinkers from Paul to Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[54]

Green Grass Running Water leaves us with the complex, paradoxical role Christian mythology can play in Indigenous spiritual narratives, for the majority of Indigenous peoples in Canada do pay allegiance to this mythology insofar as they are members of a church (National Defense Canada 70). Indigenous spirituality as King depicts it "has many rooms," certainly enough to extend generous hospitality to the Christ myth. Kidwell, Noley and Tinker contend that this "traditional valuing of shared hospitality" allows "traditional people, including medicine people, [to] come to Indian churches, [and] find it relatively easy to participate in those ceremonial 'services of worship'" (66), despite steadfastly refusing to believe in the exclusive authority of the Christian tradition being practiced. Ironically, in King's novel, this inclusiveness *can* be read as subversive hospitality, for some adherents of the Christ myth might contend that Indigenous traditions should be seeking entry into the Christ's father's many-roomed mansion, rather than the other way around. This reversal of roles undoes the assumed authority of Christian traditions, but analyses whose focus rarely extend beyond this feature of King's novel risk insufficiently appreciating the quality and measure of the novel's hospitality to Christian mythology itself. The spirit of laughter that accompanies this hospitality can, for example, be frequently interpreted

only as satirical without appreciating the traditions that might otherwise inform the novel's "profane" engagement with the Christian sacred. Among the Navajo, a child's first instance of laughter remains an important initial rite of passage (Nilsen and Nilsen 27), and I suspect that unless many of us are born again as Navajo children we shall never be able to entertain the god of King.

In *Green Grass Running Water*, even staunchly Roman Catholic Indigenous peoples feel welcome to participate in the Sun Dance (261). Indeed, Diance Glancey recalls attending her first Sun Dance in which an Elder, over the loud speaker, graciously welcomes Christians by announcing "the Sun Dance is a form of Christ going to the cross" (122). When it comes to this hospitality, there is nothing new under the Sun Dance: hospitality among the Indigenous peoples of the Americas has been long known to European Christians. Christopher Columbus and early Jesuit missionaries not only highlighted the value of hospitality and generosity that Natives extended to them, they also noted that these qualities characterized the social dynamics of Indigenous life as they witnessed it (McPherson 80). The living vibrancy of this hospitality is but one reminder of the tenacious continuity of Indigenous cultures in the face of continued colonialism. Admittedly scratching the surface in their account of the hospitality Christian mythology has received within Indigenous traditions, Kidwell, Noley and Tinker note that Indigenous Christians have variously imagined Jesus's temptation in the wilderness as a vision quest (16) or placed him at the centre of the late nineteenth century Ghost Dance movement of Wovoka (97).[55] Although King's novel hardly presents a comparable apologetic for "Indigenized" Christianity, accompanying the satire that renders Christian mythology "strange" is a paradoxical hospitality towards Christian mythology that has often been underappreciated. The Christ myth appears in the novel, paradoxically, as both stranger and (often unrecognized) friend.

Chapter 3

Lion and Monkey:

Perichoretic Tricks and Revolutionary Personhood

in Derek Walcott's *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*

1. Introduction

This chapter considers the simultaneous "appropriation" and "abrogation" (B. Ashcroft et al. 37–38) of Christological lion imagery and titles within the post-colonial mien of Derek Walcott's lyrical play, *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Set in an unnamed Caribbean locale during an era that seems synchronous with Caribbean independence movements in the 1960s and 1970, Walcott's play traces the messianic aspirations of its impoverished, initially imprisoned central character, Makak. Staged almost entirely within Makak's dream, Walcott's play explores Makak's vision of a post-colonial salvation premised on shedding colonial indignities and appropriating authoritarian power. Makak believes, or is ultimately coaxed into believing, that this salvation can best be effected by returning to Africa and reclaiming (or recreating) regal titles and traditions. Liberally laced with references to tricksters from varied Caribbean sites--some commonplace, some particularly associated with Carnival--Walcott's play probes Makak's quietly rising consciousness of the Christologically construed paradoxes enmeshed in his dream. Stoked by a coterie of trickster figures, Makak's dream grows increasingly confusing and blood-soaked, exposing how crass colonial projections of power can still command sinister post-colonial desire. When the play reaches its conclusion, Makak wakes up and is set free. In Makak's waking and release, the paradoxes with which *Dream* has been playing are radically reconfigured: the emptiness of colonized desire and the nightmarish spectacle of its pursuit give way to Makak's intimations on post-colonial power extending, Christologically, beyond the constraints of the colonial imaginary.

The Dream on Monkey Mountain associates lion imagery and titles with Makak, who tests the paradoxical identities they evoke by recasting the Bible's eschatological lion-lamb paradox as a lion-monkey paradox that enjoins rival characters from West African diasporic trickster tales. The multiple mythologies that colour Makak's characterization evince the varied composition of Caribbean cultures,

but the play is hardly an incautious celebration of Caribbean post-colonial cosmopolitanism. *Dream* reminds us that painful colonialism fomented post-colonial strategies of identification. The play, nevertheless, takes to task notions that post-colonial empowerment lies in restoring an identity unsullied by the indignities of colonial history. *Dream* invokes the lion-monkey paradox to explore a disturbing irony: pursuits of post-colonial dignity, if imagined only as restoring pre-colonial purity, remain so fettered to understandings of power as laid out by colonialism that they merely commandeer, not break, colonial reins. Otherwise put, *Dream* suggests that as long as colonialism is writing the rules, winning the game is irrelevant: *Dream* imagines post-colonial empowerment as including the trickster's agency to rewrite the rules of the game itself. To this end, *Dream* stages a fantastical, grotesquely carnivalesque competition between *several* closely associated trickster figures, all vying for ascendency—comically, pathetically, violently—in a post-colonial setting where competing tropes, typifications, and typologies of "power" must confront their embrangled metamorphoses. Through Makak, however, *Dream* challenges audiences to imagine new possibilities for post-colonial empowerment, ones not shackled to colonial definitions of power and personhood, ones that seek more than an invidious inversion of an oppressive order.[56] The play provides no concrete vision of what these new possibilities may resemble, heavily favouring evocation over exposition. *Dream*, nevertheless, leaves audiences with the sense that a post-colonial future should not only trouble oppositions assumed to be Manichean under colonialism, it should do so in a manner that surprises us as thoroughly as an eschatological vision of a lion lying down, or even dancing, with a monkey.[57]

My reading of *Dream* begins by contextualizing the lion and monkey tropes that are paradoxically collocated within Makak's post-colonial personification. To demonstrate how a lamb's Christological achievement of a lion's title is analogous to a "monkey's" achievement of a lion's title in *Dream*, I compare the play's invocations of Caribbean messianic politics, the Biblical lion-lamb paradox, and paradoxes characterizing West African-inspired Caribbean tricksters. My discussion proceeds to introduce the dynamics of this paradox by drawing on the poetics of perichoresis within Christological

and Trinitarian meditations on "personhood." Before proceeding with an extended, close reading of these issues in *Dream*, I take a moment to consider the significance of Carnival and masking conventions when staging the paradoxes of Makak's perichoresis. The parameters I have outlined for my reading may seem dizzying, but their shared relevance will surface as I work through a play that Walcott cautioned was "illogical, derivative, contradictory," a "physical poem" insofar as "successive detonations of images [are] not dominated by a narrative logic" (*Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays* 208). The lion-monkey paradox catalyzes Makak's perichoretic personhood within a play that is a "mosaic of folklore connected by fantasy" (Josephs 1), a play that "dramatizes the impossibility of fixity" (Uhrbach 578). Amid this carnivalesque tumult, Makak's perichoresis emerges in the dexterity of his personification as it signifies the transposition and revolution of paradoxical identities, representing a post-colonial hope of sustained, inclusive pluralism.

2. Expository Strategies Engaging Paradoxes of the Christ as Lion and Lamb

    2.1. Lion Imagery

    "There would not be the life of a lion, if there were no slaying of animals," wrote Aquinas (97), evoking the lion's ferocity as proverbs from across the globe have done for ages. "If your hand is in the lion's mouth," cautions one contemporary Caribbean Canadian retelling of an English proverb at least as old as eighteenth century Boston, "you take your time and pull it out." (Henry 91; Bartlett 196). The tale of the ass dressed in the lion's skin, as ancient as Aesop and the Panchatantra, was even used by that steadfast advocate of *sola scriptura*, Martin Luther, in his exegesis of Paul's epistle to the church at Rome (Luther 388).[58] Beyond its far-reaching connotation as a dreaded predator, within the Biblical tradition lion imagery generally describes power, not morality: God (Job 10:16, Lamentation 3:10, Hosea 11:10); his followers (Proverbs 28:1, 1 Samuel 17:36, I Kings 10:19-20); and their adversaries (Psalm 7:1-2, Psalm 22:13, Jeremiah 50:17, 1 Peter 5:9) are all described as lions. During the opening scene of *Dream*, set in a prison, we are introduced to Makak by his jailor, Corporal Lestrade, who mockingly calls him "the Lion of Judah" (217) and accuses him of "claiming he was the direct descendant of African kings, a

healer of leprosy, and the Saviour of his race" (225). Makak frequently refers to himself as a lion (228-229, 236, 240, 285, 287), but not as commonly as other characters refer to him as such (217, 242, 265, 284-286, 296, 314-315).[59] In the play, lion imagery and connotations surrounding the title Lion of Judah" prove paradoxical in key Christological respects.

First, consider the multiple allusions entwined in the title, "Lion of Judah." Biblically, the title is a thoroughly paradoxical, chiefly eschatological, regal, messianic and martial title for the Christ in Revelation. To appreciate *Dream*'s deft use of this Biblical allusion, we must first consider how the title, within the historical context of the play, was also explicitly associated with Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, coronated in 1930 (Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity* 63). The Emperor's "reign" spanned colonial, anti-colonial and post-colonial eras; his mythic relevance initially emboldened Marcus Garvey's Afrocentric movement (R. Lewis 146); and Rastafarian movements deified him (R. Lewis 149).[60] When Walcott wrote *Dream* in Trinidad during the 1960s, regions across the Caribbean were witnessing the heated rise of American-inspired Black Power[61] movements that often found easy alliance with those who revered Selassie as an incarnation of negritude (R. Lewis 51).[62] Makak—poor, weary, disoriented—bears little semblance to a figure as iconic as Selassie. He is certainly no conventional image of power. Lestrade seems cruelly truthful when he ridicules Makak, a coal bearer, of pretending to be someone of Selassie's renown. For much of the play, nevertheless, Makak believes he has divine power, a royal African heritage, and a calling to lead a back-to-Africa movement. The differences between Makak and Selassie, regardless, seem as stark as those between a lion and a lamb, or between a lion and a monkey. Makak's marked dissemblance to Selassie, however, does not merit dismissing as delusional his claim to the title, "Lion of Judah." In fact, the discrepancy between Makak and his contrapuntal title more faithfully recalls the Biblical paradox animating the title, "Lion of Judah."

The narrator of Revelation, in chapter 5, has a dreamlike experience during which he hears a celestial creature declaring, "Behold, the conquering lion of Judah!" (ESV)—but he does not see a lion. He sees a disfigured and transfigured lamb, scarred as if it had been sacrificed, now alive and transfigured

with a surfeit of eyes and horns. Not only is there no lion in "Lion of Judah," but the title refers to a creature whose significations include a slaughtered lamb. Like the narrator's surprise at the discrepancy between the title he hears and the peculiar creature to whom it is assigned, audiences of *Dream* recognize a striking discrepancy between the title we hear and the character, Makak, to whom it is assigned. *Dream* emphasizes the paradox behind Makak's Christological title by introducing him as the "Lion of Judah" while staging two criminals in cells on either side of him. This scene resembles the crucifixion of the Christ as told in Luke's gospel, whereas the title "Lion of Judah" refers to the empowered Christ of the apocalypse. Even the tone in which Lestrade introduces Makak as the "Lion of Judah"—surely sarcastic—evokes the sarcasm of the regal titles the Christ was granted during his crucifixion (Luke 23:38), not the sincerity of these titles granted during his apocalyptic vindication. *Dream* reminds us that Revelation's paradox of a lion that is a lamb joins storied Biblical images in a manner that problematizes the messianic Lion of Judah's grotesque capacity for bloodletting (Revelation 14:9-11) by depicting him simultaneously as a sacrificed lamb ("lamb" being the most popular title for the Christ in Revelation, appearing thirty times). Indeed, we are told in verse 5:5 that the Lion of Judah is uniquely worthy of opening a sacred scroll because he has "conquered," only be to be told paradoxically in verse 9 that the Lion of Judah is uniquely worthy of this task because he was slain and his blood was spilled. Conquering and being slain signify the same merit, if not the same paradoxical act. *Dream*, in subtly emphasizing the lamb side of lamb-lion paradox, contrasts itself with Rastafari movements that too often interpreted Selassie's "lion" title principally in triumphalist terms and, therefore, sacrificed the significance of the other animal within the Lion of Judah paradox.

The word "lamb" never appears in *Dream*, despite its frequent use of eschatological lion imagery: in this way, the play slyly resembles Leonard Percival Howell's 1935 proto-Rasta text, *The Promised Key*, in which the word "lamb" is *entirely* absent despite the frequency of lion and apocalyptic Christological titles it bestows on Selassie. "Oh come let us adore him," wrote Howell of Selassie, "for he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, The Conquering Lion of Judah," and "Earth's Rightful Ruler" (5).[63] Howell's language, toned by its allusion to a Christmas hymn and a series of regal, Biblically-inspired

titles, is echoed by Makak's most fanatical follower who praises Makak by paraphrasing Psalm 98[64]—

"majesty, noise, slogans, parades . . . Gongs, warriors bronzes . . . clap your hands you forests. Makak

will be enthroned!" (308) *Dream*, however, ultimately troubles the earnestness of Howell's lion imagery

by reminding audiences that the Biblical allusion through which this lion imagery seeks to authorize its

claims does not, simplistically, refer to a lion at all.

   Dream proceeds from this opening scene to reconfigure the lion-lamb paradox as a lion-monkey

paradox, the play "Christologically" enjoins storied creatures in African diasporic trickster narratives who

are commonly prefigured as foes, much like lions and lambs are commonly prefigured as predator and

prey within Biblical narratives (consider 1 Samuel 17-34). Although local variations of the monkey-lion

trickster tales abound, the most common or prescient feature of these tales deals with the less powerful

monkey using his verbal wit to deceive and disempower the lion, usually successfully. Curiously, when

the Bible deals in eschatological imagery, not only do lions and lambs enjoy a bloodless relationship, but

their topoi are paradoxically united within the Christ. Why the eschatological lion is or must be a lamb

has provoked centuries of Christian speculation and meditation, for the lamb-lion paradox deeply troubles

assumptions about power. *Dream* similarly leverages the eschatological imagery associated with the

"Lion of Judah" to trouble assumptions about empowerment by uniting, in Makak, the cunning monkey

and the bombastic lion. Much as the lamb-lion paradox of Revelation challenges readers to accept that the

lamb *is* worthy of being called a lion, despite being a creature with little semblance to a lion, *Dream*

challenges audiences to accept Makak as worthy of his title, "Lion of Judah," despite his dissemblance to

Selassie. Far from asking audiences to dismiss Makak's claim to lion-like eschatological eminence, as I

will later demonstrate, *Dream* uses the Christological tricks of perichoresis to makes a case for it.

Now, because Makak's persona extends beyond his individuated character—a dynamic I will address in

my close-reading of the play—Makak's apperception of his violent lionhood is envisaged, embodied, and,

indeed, personified by Lestrade.[65]

2.2 Monkey Imagery

Like lion imagery in *Dream*, monkey imagery in the play is also composed using multiple mythologies. In the New World, the trickster monkey's "many guises, names, and cultural origins" include African, Egyptian, Celtic and Indian mythologies (Rahim). In a Caribbean context, it would not be difficult to imagine the cheeky Monkey King of Chinese tradition adding to the trickster monkey's mixed mythological roots. "This transcultural character of the monkey topos," notes Jennifer Rahim, "marks the collective mythopoetic imagination of the diverse ethnic groups that comprise the Americas" (Rahim). For colonized communities, the "monkey topos" includes the cunning appropriation of bestial symbolism used by their colonizers to categorize them as sub-human. Moira Ferguson acknowledges the important role "monkey plays in Caribbean culture as a trickster" before directing us to consider how monkey imagery was applied to colonized peoples:

As racist tropes for Africans, monkeys always have an identity in flux. In eighteenth century England, monkeys appear in texts emblematic of foreigners. In 1713, moreover, among countless examples, Sir Richard Blackmore spoke of the great chain of being as follows:

"So the Ape or Monkey, that bears the greatest Similitude to Man, is the next Order of Animals below him. Nor is the Disagreement between the basest Individuals of our Species and the Ape or Monkey so great, but that were the latter endowed with the Faculty of Speech, they might perhaps as justly claim the Rank and Dignity of the human Race, as the Savage *Hottentot*, or the stupid Native of *Nova Zembla*." (Ferguson 171)

This characterization of non-Europeans as more ape-like than human retained its currency across centuries and continents: in 1900, American Charles Carroll for example presented a thick, tedious, racist tract posing as a theological treatise, *The Negro Beast: Or, In the Image of God*–with chapters titles such as, "The Bible and Divine revelation, as well as reason, all teach that the Negro is not human" (339)—clumsily inventorying comparisons of Africans to monkeys in Western thought. More recently, Henry Louis Gates Jr., in his study of the African American trickster figure, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, argues that appropriating an image so steeped in racist history

simultaneously acknowledges the burden of the image—indeed, evokes its potency—while giving those with whom it remains associated some agency to manipulate, channel or diffuse it for subversive ends. Gates's insights regarding the Signifying Monkey can be useful when considering Makak's cryptic tricksterism, but before we can consider Gates's insights in more detail we should briefly consider why Makak qualifies as a peculiar variant of the Signifying Monkey.

When tracing the African roots of the Signifying Monkey, Gates contends this trickster shares close kinship with West African-inspired tricksters in the Caribbean through their common Yoruba-speaking progenitor, Èsù-Elégbára. Among Gates's arguments, he "wonders, incidentally, about this Afro-American figure and a possible French connection between *signe* ('sign') and *singe* ('monkey')" (*The Signifying Monkey* 105). Makak initially speaks in French, and his name sounds like a colonial French word for monkey derived "from Fiot, A Bantu language" (Hogan, *Colonialism and Cultural Identity* 62). Michelle Davis pursues these possibilities. After conducting a detailed, ethnographic comparison of trickster monkey figures in the United States and those in the French Creole islands of the South Carolina Sea, Davis concludes that Makak is the French Creole "equivalent" (iii) of the American Signifying Monkey. Indeed, the Louisiana song, "Little Makak Becomes Big" bears an uncanny semblance to the much of the plot of *Dream*: in the song, a "black monkey" with an "old jacket "and pants "full of holes" (M. J. Davis 198) dresses up in fine regalia and inspires the final verse:

> Makak there was a dirty Nigger one time
>
> He is better than all whites on the earth, [?] [*tou blan asteur,*]
>
> Because it is he who made us the law
>
> It is he our governor
>
> Makak there was becoming big
>
> He who was not bigger than a mouse
>
> He was bigger than an elephant (M. J. Davis 199)

Gates's and Davis's theses regarding the interrelatedness of African trickster figures in the "New World" seems widely supported (Beckford 74; M'Baye 52, 59,192), as are broader arguments regarding histories of cultural exchange between African American and Afro-Caribbean cultures (Nelson; Jahn).[66]

By the mid-twentieth century, one the liveliest site of monkey-lion trickster tales remained African American "toasts"—bawdy, violent and rhyming tales in which the Signifying Monkey and a lion are explicitly prefigured as adversaries (Levine 378).[67] Within the broader context of black diasporic trickster tales in the Americas, even when prefigured adversaries are not named "monkey" or "lion," the central narrative in these tales usually involves a weaker creature outwitting one up the food chain through a technique Gates clarifies as "signification." Gates argues that "signification," despite its currency in contemporary linguistics and critical theory, enjoys a somewhat different meaning within African American vernacular. Gates presents an understanding of "signifying," as used in the tag Signifying Monkey, that starts by referencing Roger D. Abrahams oft-cited 1970 American urban ethnography, *Deep Down in the Jungle*: "it is signifying to stir up a fight between neighbours by telling stories; it is signifying to make fun of a policeman by parodying his motions behind his back; it is signifying to ask for a piece of cake by saying, 'My brother needs a piece of cake'" (Abrahams 51–52). Gates agrees that "signifyin(g)"[68] includes chicanery, but he cautions against reducing "signifyin(g)" to a synonym for nothing more than chicanery. Gates argues that "signifyin(g)" can be a "mode of encoding for self-preservation" and an "indirect form of communication, as a troping" (*The Signifying Monkey* 67,68). Through mimicry and manipulation, diasporic West African trickster figures such as the Signifying Monkey usually outwit opponents "who supposedly are supreme in the forests: Tiger, Lion, Elephant" (Mosby 35). Initially, Makak seems as far from fitting this description as he does from fitting Selassie's. Makak hardly seems silver-tongued: when we first meet him, he cannot even remember his name. Although Makak later enjoys moments of eloquence, he does not go on to command the largest share of dialogue in the play: Corporal Lestrade and Makak's friend, Moustique, each have more lines in the play than Makak. Makak never uses mimicry or verbal skill to wheedle out of trouble; in fact, as I will

demonstrate, he is mimicked and seems easily manipulated. Makak not only believes he is a lion—that is, the very character with whom the trickster monkey would conventionally be at odds—he plays the role of the dupe that usually belongs to the lion in a West African diasporic trickster tales.

So far, I have been considering how Makak, despite the connotations behind his name and title, seems like *neither* an eschatological lion nor a trickster monkey—hardly *both*, as a Christological analogue would assume. My contention that Makak should rightfully be considered both depends on a close reading of the play that contextualizes the play's carnivalesque substitutions of identity within its call for more dynamic perichoresis, one in which the monkey dances with the lion until their particular identities are signified by the union achieved in the dance itself. To help appreciate why Makak's "signifying" attempts perichoresis, or to appreciate the consequences of casting Makak as the trickster prism through whom the community of characters are made perceivable to audiences, consider the high hermeneutic offices that Gates and Northrop Frye assign, respectively, to Èsù/Signifying Monkey and the Christ. Emphasizing Èsù's hermeneutic role, Gates describes Èsù as "the god of interpretation," one who "embodies the ambiguity of figurative language," one who serves as a "metaphor for the act of interpretation itself" ("The 'Blackness of Blackness'" 688) —much as the Signifying Monkey "exists in the discourse of mythology not primarily as a character in a narrative but rather as a vehicle for narration itself" ("The 'Blackness of Blackness'" 688). Among the incarnations and transmutations of Èsù, Gates surprisingly does not consider how similarities between the Christ and Èsù may have been conflated in African diasporic contexts. Consider, for example, how close Northrop Frye's description of the Christ comes to Gates's of Èsù:

> Jesus is . . . the totality of creative power, the universal visionary in whose mind we perceive the particular. But the phrase 'Word of God' is obviously appropriate also to all works of art. . .This is the vision of God (subjective genitive: the vision which God in us has). (*Fearful Symmetry: A Study Of William Blake* 112)

Makak, whose dream makes characters discernable to audiences, is similarly not only a character but a vehicle for the play's narration, the visionary in whose mind audiences perceive particularized characters, or perceive the vision that Makak in us implants.[69]

In *Dream,* perichoresis is a masterful trick, one that confuses categories of colonial distinction with "ambiguity and figurative language," disclosing new possibilities of personhood and community. And, again, because Makak's persona extends beyond his character's individuation, Makak's apperception of his identity as a trickster monkey is envisaged, embodied, and personified by Moustique.[70] Consistent with *Dream*'s tricky dynamic between characterization and personification, Moustique "the monkey" in this sense mirrors Lestrade "the lion." I will explore this dynamic in detail when I venture my close-reading, but I must first attend to a theological concept, a cultural ritual and dramaturgical device—perichoresis, Carnival, and masks—whose kinship enables the staging of this dynamic.

2.3 Perichoresis

Perichoresis, "a dynamic event of interdependent reciprocity" (Harvey 89), is a term whose origins and applications remain theologically complex and historically contested (Gifford 18–19; see also Lytle). Most sources identify its early usage with Gregory of Nazianzus in the fourth-century, who used it to try to explain the human-divine paradox of the Christ, and with John of Damascus three centuries later, who either extended its application (or used it in an entirely different manner, depending on your theological orientation) to describe relationships between Trinitarian persons (Crisp 4–5; Lytle 19). Without discounting the Christological and Trinitarian lineages and applications of perichoresis, Charles Twobly's study of the relationship between perichoresis and personhood maintains, "uses of *perichoresis* in the Trinity and the Incarnation are linked in mutually supportive ways."

Even though the language of mutual indwelling takes on different shape and colouring as it moves through each of these doctrines, it nevertheless reveals a constant deep structure in which identity and difference form the basic elements. (104; see also Kaiser 122)

The contemporary "retrieval of and revival" (Collins 81) of the term perichoresis by theologians "whose interests lie in liberation" somewhat brazenly conflates the original connotations of perichoresis—which include "making room or space," (T.F. Torrance) "mutual indwelling," or "coinhering" (Twombly 1) — with those of another, very similar Greek word—*perichoreuo* ("dance around," from which we get our word "choreography"). These terms may share no etymological roots (Duck and Wilson-Kastner 35), but sympathetic "scholars today generally agree that although the philological evidence does not indicate that *perichoresis* is directly derived from *perichoreuo*, their close association and the play on words nicely underscore the dynamic sense of perichoresis" (Seamands 144).[71] Or as James Gifford notes, "While "dance" is not etymologically correct, it does provide a helpful metaphor to explain how *perichoresis* functions in the Godhead" (16).

Popularizers of perichoretic thought, then, have used a *play on words*, a trickster's tool, to groom a theological malapropism into a respectable, often unwittingly invoked pun. This linguistic remixing is why, despite questionable appeals to etymology, perichoresis can today be posited as the way the "divine persons flow in and out of each other like participants in an intricate dance," (Boyer and Hall 73) or, "a type of sacred dance, within God's own nature," (Baker-Fletcher 45) one in which the "three hypostases dynamically, relationally dance around and within one another" (56; see also Ford 242).[72] In contemporary English, punning may be a low-brow, groan-inducing form of word-play (McArthur 823), but the role of punning—formally, "paronomasia"—is a communicative trick with an honourable lineage within Christian traditions and beyond (Delabastita). Jane M. Snyder argues that Roman playwrights by the time of Jesus, such as Lucretius, were not principally using puns for humour (372); W.H. Kebler identifies paronomasia within some of Jesus's speeches (199); John Chrysostom argues that paronomasia is important enough to Biblical Greek to riddle the labours of New Testament translators (517).

Perichoresis may be presented as a revival of an ancient doctrine, but its contemporary usage, in its use of paronomasia, also revives a belief in Christian antiquity that "puns were used to suggest deep truths" (McArthur 187–88). Pursuing deep truths in a pun embroils perichoretic theologies in a trickster's enterprise, one whose study of a dance-like distribution of identity among multiple *personae* provides wily and rewarding resources for my study of the Christological characterization in *Dream*. Indeed, as Jan Urbach observes, puns within *Dream* itself "are not simply humorous but frequently are of profound meanings" ("A Note on Language and Naming in Dream on Monkey Mountain" 579). Keeping in mind the value of puns, and that *circumincession* was a late patristic Latin translation for perichoresis (Bermejo 741–42; Kaiser 122) that by medieval Latin literally translated into "going round" (*OED*, "Circumincession, n."), I propose that perichoresis as evinced in *Dream* presents a revolutionary mode of personhood.

Within the considerable body of scholarship on *Dream,* my reading of the play affirms, and liberally extends, Edward Baugh's observation that the "redemptive dramatic affirmation of the humanity and *personhood* of Caribbean man," finds "acclaimed expression in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*" (83, emphasis mine). Baugh's observation echoes a central goal of post-colonial Caribbean theology—"to directly encourage the collaboration of all in the creation of the new Caribbean Person" (Ching 10; see also Devon 194; Sitahal 135; de Schrijver 375; B. Bailey 57). Meditations on actualizing this "New Caribbean Person" differ, but arguments that invoke the term as a noble goal agree, firstly, that "personhood" is a crucial site for Caribbean theological praxis and, secondly, that personhood as understood in Caribbean contexts requires a complex, conscious and creative negotiation with various forces that seek to deny or confine it. The model of personhood I explore in *Dream* is perichoretic, positing "the person as a relational category" (P. Fox 32) inspired by the personae of a "relational God" (P. Fox 18) whose "dynamic, relational life of different but equal persons-in-communion [is] the center point" (P. Fox 97).

Explorations of perichoresis often explicitly suggest or implicitly stumble upon another term from European classical dramaturgy: *prosopon* (Greek) or *persona* (Latin), whose denotations included the

masks worn by different dramatic personae (P. Fox 33; see also LaFleur). The provenance of this mask

metaphor within Christian understandings of personhood, as I will discuss, remain as deep as they remain

deeply debated. *Dream* blends these tensions into culturally rich tropes of masking, ones that critique

facades of colonial empowerment while heralding perichoretic personhood as a post-colonial goal. For

most of the play, Moustique and Lestrade—respectively symbols of a mimic monkey and a violent lion—

wage an internecine, carnivalesque contest to manipulate Makak. This contest, enacted entirely within

Makak's dream, concludes only when Makak awakes and these once antagonistically positioned *personae*

presage a paradoxically shared, intersubjectively actualized personhood. For contemporary theoreticians

of perichoresis, *Dream* provides a post-colonial study of personhood realized, paradoxically, by

recognizing itself in its otherness. In this respect, Patrick Taylor's analysis of *Dream* as a post-colonial

narrative that "engages the process of historical transformation with a view to the possibility of creating a

society based on human mutuality," (Taylor xii) finds happy accord with understandings of God's

perichoretic personae who, as a model for *our* liberatory personhood, evince the "rich reality of lover and

beloved, of giving and receiving, of union in distinction. God is not simply a self but also an ecstatic

mutuality of delighted interpersonal communion" (Boyer and Hall 72; see also Kinnison 73). Similarly, as

this chapter will more fully demonstrate, consider the resonance of perichoretic meditations within

Taylor's position that "only in a leap of consciousness, a leap through which a new and open-ended

relationship to history and humanity is established" (7), can the "quest for freedom in history" be pursued

while the "myths imposing finite closure on human possibility" remain resisted (Taylor 19). Taylor's

analysis, as echoed within meditation on perichoresis, privileges that which is "open-ended and complex"

(Buxton Graham 25; see also Cho 96–97); emphasizes the nature of "personal relationship" is

"fundamentally dynamic" (Adiprasetya 164) ; "opens up open-ended possibilities" (Adiprasetya 164) of

"consciousness" as "mutual indwelling, of being with and for the other" (B. Anderson 151); and premises

itself on Trinitarian "consciousness . . . understood in terms of "complete mutual indwelling and

interpenetration of the Three Persons in the Godhead" (Thornton 126) in which, paradoxically, no

"collective consciousness…represses the individuality of the persons, nor an individual consciousness

which neglects what is common" (Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life* 224; see also B. Anderson144; B. Bailey 95; Gunton 128). At the risk of oversimplifying the lineage of my analysis, where Taylor focuses on narrative as a site of post-colonial liberation, I focus on "personhood."

Indeed, Makak's personification not only holds soteriological import within this trend in Christian thought—"salvation is identified with the realization of personhood" (P. Fox 50)—it also has an eschatological edge. Jürgen Moltmann, in positing perichoresis as eschatological realization, emphatically censures millenarian, imperialist eschatologies of nineteenth century Europe. Moltmann decries how European imperialist aspirations, whose violence he sometimes feverishly details (*The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* 211–14) have created a post-colonial world in which "a billion and a half go hungry and fifty million die of hunger disease every year," yet registers only in the West/North as a "the 'silent apocalypse' of the modern world." Whereas imperialist eschatologies sought global hegemony "with the solemn rhetoric of perfecting the world at the end of history" (Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* 4), Makak's persona proposes perichoresis as a different fulfilment of history, one in which a "person only comes to himself by expressing and expending himself in others" (Molmtann, *The* Trinity 174).

Perichoretic thought then posits the divine dynamic of Trinitarian personae—in which "Persons exist only as they exist for others" (Turner 221) —vitalizes an ethical impetus to "live out personhood in the image of the Trinitarian God" for to "live otherwise is to live in darkness, death, alienation, and all manner of other 'false' modes of personhood" (Turner 221; see also Kruger 15). "I am not a *prosopon*," confesses Kallistos Ware, "unless after the image of the Trinity I face others, looking into their eyes and allowing them to look into mine . . . I realize myself as a *prosopon*, a person-in-relation" (236). Richard Kearney asserts that the "eschatological universal holds out the promise of perichoretic interplay of *personas*, meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving." Conflating the Latin *persona* with the Greek *prosopon*, Kearney contends the utility of a shared metaphor surfaces when its etymology is principally distilled to its dramaturgical denotations:

to be a *prosopon* is to be a face-toward-a-face. . .signaling that the *prosopon*-persona can never

really exist on its own . . . but emerges in ethical relation to others. In this sense, the *prosopon*

may be said to be radically intersubjective. (18)[73]

As Lincoln Harvery clarifies, "In Christian theology, perichoresis denotes the way in the persons of the

Trinity give and receive existence from each other. . . they exist *into* each other, thereby dynamically

constituting the shared life that is God" (89). Chan Ho Park's explication of Moltmann's eschatology

proposes the community formed by the Christ in the eschaton, in which personhood is realized through

communion, reflects the type of personhood achieved within God's triune communion of persons:

Moltmann envisions eschatological perichoresis producing "a community" in which

we take responsibility for other, [and] these others exist in a certain way *in us*, at least in our

solidarity for them. That is why in Christian faith we say: because Christ *is for us* and gave

himself for us, *we are in Christ*. . . We are always there for other people and *in* other people, just

as other people are there for us and in us. In human community we mutually open up for each

other the space of freedom through love, or we close them through intimidation. We are presence,

space and dwelling for one another. . .The perichoretic space concept of reciprocal in-existence

corresponds on the creaturely level to the concept of the eternal inner-Trinitarian indwellings of

the divine Persons. (41)

Moltmann ties his Christology to his eschatology by making perichoresis an instrument of "politico-

ethical praxis" which seeks "to mirror the divine reality through a political *mimesis* of God's inner life."[74]

In post-colonial contexts, such perichoretic praxis presumes "personhood is not defined by the selfish

gain for the individual, but in the reciprocal enrichment that affirms the interdependency of the

individual" (Klaasen 191). Sarah Travis's post-colonial theology, rooted in the paradoxes of perichoretic

Trinitarianism—the "space of the Trinity, the space of post-colonial theory" (128)—emphasizes that

"God's life-in-Trinity challenges the homogenizing tendency of colonialism/imperialism. It asks us to

ponder how human community can discover unity without erasing personal or group differences" (62).

As audiences in *Dream*, we are witnesses to the "inner life" of Makak's character in which a community of *personae* dwell, and in which he ultimately dwells. The entire play—except for the critical epilogue—is set within Makak's dream. Even the more realist scenes prior to the epilogue reveal their rootedness within the fantastical expanse of Makak's dreamscape. This dreamscape so heavily and unexpectedly blurs distinctions between characters that audiences are rarely certain whether Makak's fellow characters are metonymic projections of his identity, whether Makak is a metonymic composite of his fellow characters, or somehow, both. These characters continually contest shared symbols critical to their construction, even though scene after scene, even in their contrariety, these characters intimate a sublimated communion: one that remains layered within Makak's dream imagery; and one later realized when Makak's persona is released into waking life. Makak remains the play's chief signifier, its Signifying Monkey who spins *Dream*'s characters into perichoretic personhood and communion. The Christological trick of the Signifying Monkey in *Dream* is a slicker trick than simply usurping an identity that connotes might, as monkeys and lions conventionally do in trickster tales. *Dream* attempts to rework how sovereign personhood has been signified and constituted within colonial regimes. As Moltmann asserts, "sovereignty" within such regimes can "be lived only at the expense of other people, not for their benefit"—it is a "sovereignty" in which "it is death that rules, not life" (*The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* 94–95). *Dream* ponders the possibilities of the latter arising from the trauma of the former. "This personhood," Baugh's reading of *Dream* reminds us, "is enhanced by being expressed in a theatrical style that draws on popular, home-grown expressive forms combining music, dance, mime, and storytelling" (73). Divining the perichoresis of Makak requires twerking with the carnivalesque tropes that excite this perichoresis. To that end, my discussion will once again angle sideways before pressing forward.

2.4 Carnival

The history of pre-Lenten Carnival celebrations in the Caribbean, the prominence of trickster figures during Carnival, the perseverance of Carnival sensibilities within post-colonial Caribbean theatre,

the pervasiveness of Carnival motifs within Caribbean theologies, and Walcott's particular deployment of

carnivalesque tropes have all received significant critical attention (Riggio; Rico-Menigibar; Doumerc

32–34; Kingston-Smith 102; O. A. W. Thomas; Sitahal; Warner 138; Maibag). Carnival provides the

semiotic thaumaturgy in which Makak's trickster-Christ paradox is sublimated and articulated:

Christological motifs in *The Dream on Monkey Mountain* are inchoately conjugated using carnivalesque

song, dance, poetry, word play, performance and paradox.[75] Because the play intimately entangles

Christological motifs within its multiply-positioned, paradoxically alluring and lurid congress with the

carnivalesque, my discussion must briefly flesh out the Carnival allusions from which *Dream* arouses its

Christological innuendos. The carnivalesque conventions and specific Carnival allusions in *Dream* are

drawn from a range of Caribbean Carnival celebrations. My discussion will focus on four of these

conventions that are closely related, if not mutually-informing.

First, *Dream*'s aesthetic sensibility generously relies on song, dance, costume and spectacle that

sometimes evoke festivity, but mostly foregroundss a less tourist-friendly feature of Carnival: gallivanting

with the grotesque, chancing a taboo *biguine* with the macabre. As Karmenlara Seidman's study of

contemporary Carnivals in Trinidad helpfully emphasizes, the grotesque communicates "a complex and

even traumatic social memory," which is why "the grotesque can be seen as an agreement to dream

together; a contract with the festival to re-construct creative histories, ecstatic states and even violent

fantasies in the manner of a visionary experience" (217). Seidman's analysis could apply equally well to

the necessary function of the grotesque in the Eucharist—itself a complex ritualization of violence and

ecstasy nested in communal memory—as it does to the function of the grotesque in a play that lures

audiences into "an agreement to dream together." *Dream*'s carnivalesque aesthetics evoke a disorienting

erraticism, a frenzied exorcism of traumas, haunting histories, and a foreboding spookiness spirited by the

play's blurring of realist and fantastical theatricality. Second, *Dream* makes use of multiple, historically

related trickster figures who, while not restricted to Carnival celebrations, often "come out" during

Carnival celebrations as venerated performers. Although some tricksters featured in *Dream* may not

chiefly be associated with a Carnival celebration, they remain recognizable protagonists in stories whose

conclusions feature carnivalesque inversions. *Dream*, however, strips these tricksters of much of their

mirth, presenting them as menacing and ridiculous characters vying for ersatz supremacy. Third, in

Dream, carnivalesque mimicry lambasts the sanctity of colonial authority while, simultaneously,

lambasting post-colonial power—still heavily premised on colonial imitation and imprecation—for its

stunted ambitions.

Fourth, in what may be its most complex and paradoxical use of carnival imagery, *Dream*

highlights some of the Carnival-inspired symbolism shared between the moon and masks, including

tricksterism, and then extends this symbol to include, within its already embrangled rubric, a white

woman playing a voiceless phantasm. Makak's white Carnival mask "is the mask of the white goddess,"

notes Taylor, and a symbol "tied to the white moon" (218). Furthermore, *Dream* casts a human actor as a

personification of this mask; a radical dramaturgical inversion of using a mask to represent a persona.

This inversion accentuates the perplexity, precariousness and possibilities of post-colonial personhood in

environs where persons can be confused for masks. Makak's belief that the voiceless phantasm is the

same *singing* eidolon that inspired him—a belief audiences have compelling reasons to doubt—does not

spare this phantasm her paradoxical fate as an icon and target for Makak's manipulated, shamefaced rage.

The paradox of the phantasm-moon-mask further taxes and hacks the play's network of connected

symbols, often rendering interpretations of these symbols exercises in inference, supposition, postulation

and hopeful conjecture. When working with a text like *Dream*, literary exposition takes on the mien of

divination. With that caveat, the multilayered Carnival masking conventions in *Dream* require another,

modest round of analytic contextualization before I can proceed with my exposition of perichoretic

personhood in the play.

2.5 Masks

Within Èsù-inspired psychodramas like *Dream*, masks not only "allow human beings to

communicate with the spirit world," as has been intoned by Makak's vision of his apparition, masks also

serve as "crucial symbols…bridging physical and intangible consciousness . . . which also [enter] into a

complex relationship with the audience and the text" (Vásquez 100)—as happens when *we* see Makak's mask-implicated vision while his fellow players cannot. Indeed, our witness to Makak's apparition corroborates Wole Soyinka's forewarning that in an Èsù-inspired "mask drama," the "so-called audience is itself a part of an arena of conflict" (39). Being witness to Makak's apparition, however, only hints at the broader hermeneutic function of Makak's dream as the mask through which we witness most of the play's narrative. As I have already discussed, figurations of Èsù should not simply be engaged as performers but as agents of signification, as a hermeneutic medium enlivening paradox. For most of the play, audiences are trapped in the troubled dream of a Signifying Monkey; we wear Makak's persona as a mask, which is disquieting since the constitution of Makak's persona remains a chief arena of conflict in the play. Makak's dream, as a narrative mask, signals alliance and alienation as it paradoxically allies audiences with the narrative perspective of a persona seemingly alienated from himself.

Second, as Milla Riggio contends, carnival masks were also common, popular tools of Carnival trickery through which the colonized could mimic their colonizers while, simultaneously, disguising, celebrating and otherwise recognizing African customs (12). Carnival masks, paradoxically, allowed the colonized to "be themselves." Herbert Gold echoes Riggio's analysis, siting "*deguisement*—that masking which is an unmasking" as the "distinguishing ritual" (48) of Carnival in Haiti. Similarly, Babacar M'Baye abets Riggio's analysis by drawing on the tale of the Antiguan trickster, Bra Monkey, who "must laugh at the irony of an existence in which one is compelled to don a mask in order to survive an alienating world that was identical to that of the Caribbean slave," singing:

> Sing God we mek ah we
>
> Ahl below
>
> See Monkey wear a jacket
>
> Ahl below. (M'Baye 190)

This paradoxical function of masking—to disguise while revealing—signals a departure from European Carnival celebrations in which "[p]eople are no longer who they are, and the masquerade becomes the basis for social interaction. Transformed identity is conveyed through mask and costume, and revelation

of *true self* is disallowed" (Jenkins 162, emphasis mine). As Riggio elaborates, regarding the centrality

and distinctiveness of masking in Caribbean Carnivals,

> Often the "mask" is the costume itself, as glitter-decorated unmasked faces affirm the personal
>
> beauty of the masquerade. The idea of a full body mask rather than a face mask is more African
>
> than European, as in the importance given to large-scale headpieces. The idiom of Carnival
>
> playing—to "play mas" or " play mask"—suggests the integral connection between the "mas" as
>
> the activity of Carnival "playing" and the costume as a "mask." (14)

In *Dream*, tricksters mimic and manipulate each other, costuming themselves and masking their motives

as they paradoxically expose the common, carnivalesque coefficients prefixing their identities.

Third, *Dream* draws on several conspicuous conventions of masking in Western drama.[76] The

"mask is the defining convention of Greek theatre performance," contends David Wiles, before exploring

diverse and sometimes contrapuntal histories of classical masking practices (153). Wiles traces Jenkins's

assessment of masks as disguises to "Platonic dualism" which, in subordinating the body to the mind,

subordinated the actor to the playwright, and thereby turned masking into "a mode of concealment"—one

evinced, centuries later, by how the "anonymity of the renaissance mask legitimated taboo behaviour, and

the Brectian mask was made a barrier to audience identification" (153). Although concealment is

certainly one critical function of Makak's mask, the play more liberally draws on masking practices

associated with Dionysus, the god of the mask and, like Baron Samedi, the paradoxical totem of fertility

and death (Wiles 153). Makak's mask paradoxically functions as "the symbol and manifestation of that

which is simultaneously there and not there . . . It excites with a nearness which is at the same time a

remoteness" (Otto 91). *Dream*'s supple deployment of Dionysian masking conventions, for the theatre of

its time, ameliorates Jean Louis Barrault's orientalist attempts to accomplish something similar in *The*

Oresteia, first staged in 1955. Barrault, in continuing the problematic project of modernist primitivism,

recognized Dionysian parallels when witnessing masks used in Brazilian Voudoun, and then attempted a

clumsy appropriation of these masks' paradoxical purposes: in *The Oresteia*, Barrault hoped a mask could

express "the maximum of intensity together with an impression of absence . . . the maximum of life and

the maximum of death" (Barrault 91). Whereas *Oresteia*'s orientalism predictably renders "absence" and "death" connotations of otherness—that is, connotations of the "non-western, non-masculine, ultimately non-human "oriental" (Bryant-Bertail 3)—*Dream* effectuates the theatrical possibilities of Barrault's "rediscovered" Dionysian masking paradoxes by enlisting them in its feverish interrogation of colonial othering.

Fourth, masks in *Dream* allude to Fanon's diagnoses of internalized, colonial self-hatred still festering in post-colonial consciousness. Not only does *Dream*'s précis reference Sartre's introduction to *Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* is explicitly invoked when a key character repeats, verbatim, "black skin, white masks" (273). My analyses of these Fanon-inspired invocations surface later in this chapter, during my close reading of the play, in order to integrate more fluidly the significance of these analyses within the rubric of multiple significations masks enjoy in *Dream*. These analyses, however, require a modest introduction here before their expository significance can be apprized. As Fanon details in *Black Skin*, internalized colonial pathologies not only confuse the desire for whiteness with a desire for personhood, they define whiteness by the power to subjugate the colonized:

> Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, *who had no scruples about imprisoning me*, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from my self, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body. Yet this reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea. *I wanted quite simply to be a man among men*. (*Black Skin, White Masks* 92 emphases mine)

Masked and blackened by the congealed blood of self-immolation, Fanon identifies the violent futility of attempting to secure personhood by escaping one's blackness. *Dream*, however, also inverts Fanon's intentionally gendered tropes in *Black Skin*, which posit white femininity as the sexualized apex of masculinist longing to be recognized as worthy as a white man, and therefore recognized as a person (*Black Skin, White Masks* 45). Makak's destruction of a white mask—personified on stage as a white woman—enacts an attempt to purge a desire for whiteness that proves as troubling and paradoxical as

Fanon's black mask of self-immolation. Sampling Fanon references, *Dream* explicitly politicizes post-colonial relationships between masks and paradoxes of personhood.

Fifth, *Dream* wrestles with paradoxes of mask symbolism within Christological thought. Nascent Christian suspicions of the theatre and masks were evinced as early as Justin Martyr, troubled by semblances between Jesus and the patron deity of theatre and masks, Dionysus (J. H. Johnson 60). [77] These suspicions were confirmed by major patristic figures, and by the fourth century, codified by an edict from the Council of the Church of Constantinople prohibiting wearing masks, for not only was Satan their author, they still evoked "the detested Dionysus" (J. H. Johnson 60; Murrey 72; Seaford 126–27). Some readings of *Dream* interpret Makak's mask principally as demonic (Gainor 241), but these readings may too quickly gloss over the play's rehabilitation of Dionysian masking conventions in its characterization of Makak as a Christological trickster. *Dream* goes where Justin Martyr would not and Barrault could not.

Most importantly, and risibly ironic considering early Christian aversions to Dionysian masks and theatregoing in general (Barish 46; see also Saban), Hellenic dramaturgical associations between a mask and a "person" capered into core, Patristic poetics of the Christ paradox.[78] *Dream* conjures these associations and poetics to demonstrate how our understanding of Makak's mask remains invested in our understanding of his post-colonial personhood. The Latin, *persona*, and the Greek, *prosopon*, include "theatrical mask" and "person" within their denotations, along with a surfeit of connotations contingent on a writer's era, geography and theological lineage (Nedoncelle 23). This shared association between "mask" and "person," far from providing a theatre for irenic theological exchange, stirred centuries of debate (Ury 7-8), if not misunderstanding, during which pursuits of increasingly explicatory formulations of personhood were laced, intentionally or otherwise, with associations to a shunned social practice (theatregoing) and a dramaturgical device that, as Sabellius (Presitge 113) and Nestorious (Weinandy 71) discovered, could not serve as axial Christological metaphor without inviting stinging reprimands for risking Modalism. Western-leaning histories of Christian thought often contend that the fourth century

Cappadocian Fathers ventured a spirited dilution of the dramaturgical connotations associated with "person," equating "person" with "being," granting "personhood" a distinguished ontological status, and furnishing Christian thought with a cardinal theological device comfortably distanced from its contentious theatrical connotations (D'Orsa 115; Leshem 59–60; Vanhoozer 115).[79] Contemporary Western apologists for perichoretic personhood, however, contend that the Eastern, Greek, Cappadocian formulations of personhood, whose being is intersubjective and relational, remained swayed by dramaturgical connotations. As Laurel Schneider notes,

multiplicity, it turns out, is not just the flesh behind the mask of the One, it is the mask and masquerade of totality as well, popping the seams of the One's oneness in every instance. Multiplicity, which is not a synonym for "many," is a preliminary gesture and experiment in naming a logic that is supple, adaptive and rhizomatic rather than fixed, or merely predictive. (ix–x)

Because I argue that Makak's mask, in all its semiotic multiplicity and paradoxical purposing, can typify post-colonial pursuits of perichoretic personhood, the significance of Christian associations between masks and perichoresis feature critically in my exposition of *Dream*. Walcott, like Fanon before him, recognized why masks conjur vivid illustrations of how symbolism can work in post-colonial narratives: a mask, as a symbol, is surfeited with the multiple mythologies and cultural lineages of the colonized and their colonizers. This surfeit makes the mask a tricky signifier, for its inability to signify an isolated strain of its cultural DNA successfully signifies the complicated cultural genealogies with which post-colonials must negotiate, daily. And it is from this heady mix of histories that the play's Christologically-tinged explorations of personhood emerge, seeking their post-colonial measure in Makak.

2.6 A Close Reading of *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*

The Dream on Monkey Mountain opens numinously: on a minimalist stage, a spotlight over a silent African drum glows moon-like, then a nameless drummer and Baron Samedi, the Haitian trickster paradoxically associated with death and fertility, dance, waving "their arms slowly, sinuously, with a

spidery motion" (213). The scene evokes a *jwé*, "a form of rural Lucian folk music associated with . . .

full moon gatherings," in which "*lang devive*, or saying the opposite of what is meant," (Thompson 165)

remains a staple convention. [80] Moonlight is one of the Baron's chief symbols, and in *Dream* it is a

symbol he must share, or compete for, with several characters. The Baron, with a face painted half-black

and half-white, is another "Caribbean version of Èsù Elegba" (Euba, *Archetypes, Imprectators, and*

Victims of Fate: Origins and Developments of Satire in Black Drama 154), a trickster embodied in the

very mechanics of staging the moon as central prop. "Reversed," the Prologue stage directions instruct,

"the moon becomes the sun" (212), harkening one of Èsù's grander tricks of tricking the sun and the

moon to switch roles (Leeming 125). Makak, as discussed, is also a figuration of Èsù, as is the Jamaican

trickster, Anansi the Spider Man, whom the Baron is arguably greeting, mimicking, channeling, or

otherwise suggesting an intimate association. The Baron's trickster kinship with Makak, however, proves

terse, for the Baron (personified later in the play by Basil the coffin-maker) and Makak *never* talk to each

other, never exchange dialogue even when they are active in the same scene.[81] Any comic book fan can

tell you why Peter Parker and the skinny, wise-cracking American super-hero, Spider-Man, never talk to

each other: because their identities overlap—a suspicion regarding the Baron and Makak at which *Dream*

generously hints but never satisfyingly confirms.[82]

The Baron, so often symbolized by a Christian-looking cross that he is sometimes known as

Baron La Croix (Belanger 284), dances sinuously with his partner to a lament that increases in volume as

they exit the stage. The minimalist staging of the opening, astral dance is replaced by a more realist prison

set, and when the conteur and the chorus eventually cease their lament it is taken up by two prisoners on

stage, Tigre and Souris. Their names allude to "Brother Tiger" and "Brother Rat," staple characters in

trickster tales of Fante-Ashante-Caribbean provenance, during which the "main looking character of these

stories is the frail-looking spider Anancy who is pitted against physically stronger characters" (Doumerc

80).[83] When Corporal Lestrade enters the scene, dragging in the frail, disheveled Makak between Tigre

and Souris, Makak's positioning between criminals not only alludes to the Christ at his crucifixion, it also suggests Makak is assuming the narrative role traditionally assigned to Anancy.

Soon after he enters the scene, Lestrade denigrates Makak, Tigre and Souris by relying on the same tropes that made Carrols's *The Negro Beast* intelligible:[84] "In the beginning," pontificates Lestrade, "there were various tribes of the ape . . . some of the apes had straighten their backbone, and start walking upright, but there was one tribe unfortunately that lingered behind, and that was the nigger" (217-218). Despite initially lumping Tigre and Souris in with Makak, as the play continues, Lestrade and Makak share a growing intimacy mediated through their associations with the Baron. In the words of Tigre later in the play, the half-white, half-black Lestrade—like the colours of the Baron's painted face—is a "straddler, neither one thing nor the next, neither milk, coal, neither day nor night, neither lion nor monkey, but a mulatto . . . " (284). Lestrade's lack of distinction within these binaries, however, is a quality that audiences eventually realize he shares deeply with Makak.[85] On the one hand, using a trope to vivify characters from shared mythological veins is hardly novel, for as Bernard Dupriez explains, "tropes which replace one signifier with another . . . may produce symbolic relationships between the corresponding signifieds" (442). On the other hand, the complexity of the play's characterization lies in its use of a *trickster* trope for these purposes; that is, a trope premised on pretence and paradox.

Consider, for example, Lestrade's carnivalesque treatment of colonial law and its post-colonial impersonations. He dons the wig of an English lawyer, declares he can "both accuse and defend" Makak (220), confuses English (common) law for Roman (civil) law, gives Tigre and Souris towels to wear like judges' robes, and barks humiliating orders at Makak to parade his unquestioned power. And after thoroughly aping colonial legal pageantry, he musters the audacity to belittle Makak for being monkey-like—"I don't know what the hell this monkey won't do" (223). The blunt performance of carnivalesque inversion—Lestrade's deportment being more monkey-like than Makak's—is accented further as the *prisoners* Tigre and Souris buffoonishly robe themselves as fellow judges using towels Lestrade supplies. Chris Jenks notes that, "Carnival acts through strategies that ape, parody and indeed parallel the dominant

social order" (173), but consider how Jenks's analysis plays out in this scene: the "dominant" social order being parodied is post-colonial jurisprudence, and it is parodied for being a fuddled and unaware parody of colonial jurisprudence. *Dream* uses carnivalesque techniques to criticize post-colonial power for being carnivalesque, for parodying that from which it sought liberation. These compound and paradoxical functions of the carnivalesque—as the aesthetic of critique and target of criticism—deepen as the play stages its post-colonial face-off between kindred tricksters.

Furthermore, as my discussion will demonstrate, the perichoretic paradox of Makak's lion-monkey personhood is embroiled in *Dream*'s paradoxical purposing of the carnivalesque. Makak's deposition during the opening scene, for example, juxtaposes monkey imagery with lion imagery in a manner that exhausts the resolve of the scene's realism. As the previously mumbling Makak begins to speak with lyrical eloquence,[86] his prison bars ascend off stage, although no stage directions or dialogue indicate characters are shocked by this levitating prison cell, unhinged from its steely realism. Makak then describes having a "dream" (226) in which he encountered a mystical white woman, whose singing makes him "dance, / With the splendour of a lion." When his fellow characters ridicule him for identifying the apparition as "God" who spoke to him "in the form of a woman on Monkey Mountain" (226), Makak petitions the apparition as "your old black warrior / The king of Ashanti, Dahomey, Guinea," asking her if he should "put on my rage, *the rage of a lion*" (227, emphasis mine). This Makak is a very different character than the one who moments before was following Lestrade's orders without flinching. His dream made him feel divine—"I was God self"—while also making him feel human—"my spine straighten" (directly referencing Lestrade's earlier charge that he was not quite human since Africans were excluded among the sapiens that "straighten their backbone, and start walking upright" (217)). Makak's paradoxical "apotheosis" includes his humanization.

The apparition says nothing, but everyone witnesses the power of invoking her: prison bars lift; the laconic becomes lyrical; and the character who was acting like a trained monkey suddenly identifies himself as a lion and a figure of ancient authority. The apparition catalyzes our awareness of the paradox stirring within Makak, capable of being a debased "monkey" one moment, a proud "lion" the next. As the

play unfolds, this cryptic apparition will share critical associations with the Baron, as Makak does, and her character will be transposed over several identities: she is "described in play's *dramatis personae* as 'APPARITION, the moon, the muse, the white Goddess, a dancer,' and further qualified, or confused, when 'A DANCER' is also co-listed as 'NARRATOR'." Indeed, Makak conflates many of these identifications when he describes his apparition, or eidolon, as being like "the moon walking along her own road/ . . . Like the moon had climbed down from the steps of heaven, and was standing in/ front me" (227). Unlike the other characters in this opening scene (Lestrade, Tigre, and Souris) when Makak's apparition walks briefly on and off stage, nobody sees her except for Makak and the audience. In catching a fleeting glance of Makak's apparition, the audience is drawn into an intimate allegiance with Makak's narrative perspective, for now we are party to his vision in a way his fellow characters are not. When Makak's fellow characters deride him for seeing the apparition—"Tis this desire for whiteness that does drive niggers mad" (229)—they deride the audience by implication. The audience, finding itself inside the orbit of Makak's consciousness, finds its awareness of the narrative cased in a complex diegetic communion with Makak. We discern Makak's fellow characters principally as Makak discerns them— initially, as embodiments of his contradictions and, ultimately, as revelations of a perichoretic paradox.

Before this communion between Makak and the audience can be nurtured, however, the scene, set at about 8:30pm on a Saturday night, ends abruptly and the next scene opens with Makak's friend, Moustique, waking Makak up, telling him that it is market day—that is, Saturday *morning* (231). Makak seems to be waking from a dream.[87] He is on Monkey Mountain, being reminded of his not very lion-like duties as a *charbonnier*. Although the scene makes no use of a chorus or fantastical pageantry, suggesting a move into a realist mode, its realism is attenuated when Makak repeats nearly verbatim to Moustique what he insisted to Tigre, Souris and Lestrade in the previous scene: that he had vision of a mystical white woman who knew his real name and told him he was from the line of lions and kings. In this scene, however, Makak remains emphatic that his mystical encounter "Is *not* a dream" (237, emphasis mine), a point that Walcott punctuates by writing Makak's recollection of his encounter in straight, realist prose, whereas earlier the same recollection was presented in the more numinous tenor of verse. Mysteriously, a

white, Carnival mask with course, sisal hair is the only object that remains from the previous scene: Lestrade had found it among Makak's possessions, along with a half-empty bottle of rum, although here Makak seems bewildered by the mask and denies having ever seen it before (240). Moustique insults the mask, plays with it, and cheekily questions if the mask is related to Makak's vision—"She leave her face behind?" (240).

That this white apparition should count a Carnival mask among its many associations proves crucial to appreciating *Dream*'s hybridized, sometimes paradoxical symbolism, including the symbolism steering the perichoretic, lion-monkey paradox of Makak's personhood. This mask appears later in the play, and I will discuss its development as a cunning and critical theatrical device as I continue with a close reading that follows the play's narrative. For now, the Carnival mask riddles audiences with suspicions that Makak's "vision" was a carnivalesque hallucination or dream, rendering his title of lion and king something that we, like Moustique, cannot easily believe. Makak does little to help his credibility when he begins grandiose rants and attempts at regal demeanour that only, by contrast, draw attention to his impoverishment. Moustique, nevertheless, agrees to join Makak on his Quixotic quest to Africa, finally compelled by a sense of duty to his old friend, who had helped him when he was helpless. Although Moustique acknowledges Makak's instruction to "Bring nothing" for their journey, as the Christ had commanded his disciples (Luke 9:3), Moustique is no mere Sancho Panza. Rather, without having any obvious motive, he brings the Carnival mask, limping like Èsù (Gates, "A Myth of Origins" 162), hinting at his trickster heritage.[88]

Moustique, whose understandable arachnophobia—spiders kill mosquitos—casts a pall over his friendship with Makak, a character already associated with Anansi. At this point in the play, Moustique the disciple, the accomplice, becomes a central character, enjoying more speaking lines than Makak does over the next three scenes.[89] The very next scene, for example, continues to follow Makak and Moustique on their quest, during which Moustique encounters Josephus, a snake-bitten man on the verge of death, a man nobody has been able to heal. After what Moustique claims are three days of hungry traveling (244),

he exploits Makak's messiah-complex along with the sick man's family's desperation and barters

Makak's healing in exchange for bread—payment expected in advance. "[Makak] have this power and

glory," assures Moustique, echoing the description for the enthroned God in Revelation 5:13, and "he

know all the herbs, plants, bush" (247). In particular, Makak seems to be a variant of an "obeah-man"

whose hybridized West African and colonial Roman Catholic spirituality practiced West African folk

medicine using local Caribbean herbs, plants and bushes (Murrell 51; Hood 200). Long the bane of

colonial authorities terrified of any authority outside their purview—under Jamaica's "Victorian Acts of

1840, 1865, and 1857 it became clear that obeah was considered a potent and dangerously antisocial

activity" (Morrish 42; see also Saunders 208)—Moustique's self-serving inveiglement of Makak as a type

of obeah-man seems to pay homage to the lasting amperage of anti-colonial folk practices within the post-

colonial Caribbean.[90] But when Makak uses no Christian prayers or local herbs in his healing ceremony,

Moustique, the quick-talking trickster, highlights this contradiction as a witness to Makak's transcendent,

post-colonial power. Makak has succeeded, declares Moustique, where "white doctor," "bush medicine,"

"White prayers," and "black prayers" have all failed (252). The more significant trick Moustique plays

here, however, is the one aimed at the audience: Makak's actions, so central to this scene, are orchestrated

by his hungry, finagling, loquacious "sidekick." Moustique steers the scene's narrative action,

commandeering dramaturgic power as he directs all eyes to Makak. Let us consider, a little more closely,

how Moustique's involvement in the staging of Makak's healing ceremony invokes and interlaces

Dream's core Carnival tropes: song and dance, moonlight, role inversions and trickster face-offs.

Placing one hand on the dying man's head, gripping burning coals with the other, Makak's self-

immolation and Moustique's bravura stir the would-be mourners into song until Makak commands them

to "believe in themselves," at which point he is met by faithless silence. Frustrated, Makak abandons the

ceremony—"these niggers too tired to believe in anything"—and starts walking away when, suddenly,

Josephus begins reviving and the chorus again sings (250), signaling the fantastical fleetingly surfacing in

a scene that seems otherwise staged in flatly realist terms. Indeed, the fantastical cross-fades into the

realist as on-stage actors take over the off-stage chorus's singing. The moment is carnivalesque, festive,

cheered on by the tithe-collecting Moustique commanding Josephus to "dance out in the moonlight" (252). As the singing crowd exits on Moustique's order, Moustique tarries, staging a telling confrontation with Basil, a carpenter, coffin make and fellow *charbonnier,* whose distinctive top-hat and half-white, half-black painted face identify him as Baron Samedi, a fantastical character traversing a realist plane. Moustique not only belittles Basil after Makak's healing usurps the Baron's office and denies him his grim bounty, he takes the Baron's distinctive top-hat and coat, declaring that the Baron's business is "mine, from now on" (252). The dry tenor of the dialogue makes it clear that Moustique has no designs on Basil's carpentry business. Moustique is addressing The Baron, one trickster to another, about monetizing mortality.

The macabre exchange between Moustique and The Baron proves difficult to decode: its motives are hazy, and its participants trade in trickster imagery. Curiously, the elusiveness of the exchange heightens an audience's awareness that Moustique's and Basil's relationship, beyond their *dramatis personae*, includes constellations of signifiers stretching beyond our horizons of consciousness. Later scenes, as we shall see, certainly evince the indirect animus between Basil and Makak, but the principal friction between tricksters in this scene, quizzically, lies between Basil and Makak's self-appointed herald, chief apprentice and proxy: Moustique. The cryptic confrontation between Moustique and Basil, far from being a hermeneutic stumbling-block, can stoke instead an audience's curiosity as to why Basil takes no issue with Makak, even though Makak's "power" to extinguish or lengthen life, as well as the symbols that attend this power—the healing takes place at crossroads, during moonlight—are usually reserved for the Baron (Coulter and Turner 302). Indeed, when Basil later invokes symbols paired with Makak—"I tried to direct you," Basil will chastise Moustique, "*in the mask of the cold moon*" (271, emphasis mine)—Basil's identity seems eerily imbricated with Makak's apparition. This imbrication intensifies when audiences later realize that The Baron, like Makak's apparition, is not only associated with Carnival and the moon, he also has the power to be visible to audiences while remaining invisible to many of the players on stage. Otherwise put, the confrontation between Moustique and Basil may reveal little about their relationship, but it begins intimating hints about Basil's relationship with Makak.

For a moment, the dream-like nature of Moustique's encounter with Basil may leave us wondering to what extent these tricksters' tensions were staged in a carnivalesque dreamscape. But only for a moment, for after the suspiciously fantastical Basil exits, Makak enters, brimming with conviction about the realism of his fantasy. Makak believes he has really healed Josephus, and that this healing confirms his lionlike messiahship. As Vermes argues, "Jesus himself defined his essential ministry in term of exorcism and healing . . . they reflect the firm and unanimous testimony of the whole Synoptic tradition" (58). Smith Wigglesworth, the early twentieth century pioneer of Pentecostalism—arguably the fastest growing chapter of post-colonial Christianity (Woodberry 119)[91]—explicitly associated the Christ's eschatological title with personal and political healing: "There are tremendous diseases, but Jesus is healer. There is no case too hard for Him. The Lion of Judah shall break every chain. He came to relieve the oppressed and to set the captive free" (41). Because lion imagery is also central in healing ceremonies of the Yoruba-speaking Lebu, Moustique's characterization of Makak as both healer and eschatological lion would hardly be an unfamiliar paradox (Hogarth and Butler 4).

Unlike Makak, Moustique sees Josephus's revival simply as a happy and profitable coincidence. He even praises Makak for what he assumes was his friend's duplicitous theatricality during the healing ritual. Makak's initial disgust at Moustique's profiteering dissipates when the latter compares the moon— which Makak associates with his empowering apparition—to "a plate that a dog lick clean" (255), emphasizing the indignity of Moustique's poverty. Pointing to the moon, Moustique uses unmasking imagery to declare, "Behind that, is Africa!" (255) Proceeding to hold up the carnival mask and all that it symbolically embodies, Moustique presses Makak to answer, "How we going there? You think this [the mask]…this damned stupidness go take us there?" (255) The scene ends with Makak acquiescing to Moustique, unaware that Moustique does, in fact, care enough for "this damned stupidness" that he keeps it with him.

The following scene opens with Corporal Lestrade, still costumed in his legal wig and gown, entering a spotlight and indicating that he is going to recount the events of "market Saturday" (256). As the setting quickly changes to a marketplace, the audience may believe they will be seeing Lestrade's

recollection performed, but the scene in the market begins *before* Lestrade enters it and continues after Lestrade has left it. The immediate discrepancy between the narrative perspective Lestrade claims to possess and the performance the audience witnesses, which exceeds the horizons of Lestrade's recollection, disrupts the narrative realism of the scene despite its generally realist vibe. Before we next encounter Lestrade in this scene, several characters treat us to lore regarding Makak's healing powers. When Moustique enters the market, pretending to be Makak, he is welcomed with fanfare despite his ridiculous appearance. Carrying "Makak's" spear, declaring "the moon his shield" (265), all the while wearing Basil's top-hat attire, Moustique has costumed himself with emblems copped from his fellow tricksters. Moustique's persona is performed here as impersonation.

First, Moustique mimics Makak, apes the "ape" by declaring himself a lion, dispensing his prophecy in Psalm-like rhythm, playing the post-colonial heir to messianic, plantation shaman/oracles of "Black redemption cults"—"the product of a long process of incubation and result from the mixture of Christian ideas. . .[that were] grafted . . . to their traditional [West African] beliefs, giving the millenarian flavour to the Afro-Christian movements in the new world" (Barrett 96).[92] Such figures represented an alternative order of authority to that which once proceeded from colonial offices that, in *Dream*, are pursued by post-colonial officers. Moustique, moreover, parades the scope of his trickster mimicry when he caricatures Lestrade and belittles Lestrade's powers, rousing the crowd to encircle the officer, to dance and taunt, "I don't know what to say that monkey won't do" (265). The crowd sings the same jeering lyric at Lestrade that the choir had sung about Makak, two scenes ago. Considering Lestrade's penchant for petty power-tripping, freshly evinced again in the scene's opening, the crowd's carnivalesque dancing and taunting *could* be seen as a courageous, if not cathartic, defiance of a bully. *Could*, that is, if the audience had not also witnessed the following: the crowd's disconcerting lack of affect when Moustique called *them* monkeys and, more seriously, the crowd's apathy or unawareness that in mimicking Moustique's mockery of Lestrade, they are endorsing the aspersion just cast on them. Stirred by Moustique, they are twisted in a paradox that renders them the agents and the objects of their mockery.

When a spider interrupts Moustique's impersonations and appropriations of power, Lestrade orders Basil to intimidate Moustique with it, challenging Moustique to "show" his courage. Basil, more ominously, demands Moustique "show" the crowd "your hope" and "what you have learnt" (270). The crowd, in turn, chants back, "Show us! Show us!" As Moustique "cowers" (according to the stage directions), Basil takes back his hat, effectively "unmasking" Moustique (270).[93] Moustique has already demonstrated his verbal cunning; but standing here, now the unmasked and stripped trickster, Moustique's fiery cajolery has been reduced, in Basil's words, to "vapour, steam, promises without meaning" (269). Indeed, without his "mask," Moustique, among the "men-of-words" Caribbean tricksters, jarringly loses his stylized argot and delivers a livid, disjointed rant, flush with unfounded accusations fused into sputtered confessions. Rather than showing contrition, Moustique misconstrues and mocks the beliefs of a crowd whose messianic hopes he has just exploited, accusing them of wishing for a miracle to make them "all white" (273), then showing them Makak's carnival mask while proclaiming, "All I have is this. . .black faces, white masks!" (273) Moustique's accusation, like so many of his actions, seems ambiguously motivated: Makak's popularity is based on his reputation as a healer; Makak never promised whiteness, nor was he ever reputed to. And Makak's back-to-Africa movement bespeaks a naïve-yet-earnest Afrocentric negritude, not a desire to grab the breasts of white civilization or purge progeny of blackness.

So what is going on here? Perhaps Moustique has fundamentally misunderstood the crowd's desire for wellness as a desire for whiteness. Perhaps Moustique, whose persona impersonates and appropriates his fellow tricksters' powers—Makak, by title; Basil, by costume; Lestrade, by conduct—reveals his Carnival prop as a confession: he cannot impersonate whiteness and, therefore, cannot appropriate its power. Perhaps Moustique, the master imposter, has met his match in the Carnival mask, an ancient symbol for personhood in which Moustique can find no personhood. Perhaps Moustique is plainly and painfully acknowledging that the crowd, had they been white, would not have fallen for his carnivalesque charade. Or perhaps *Dream* is setting up another trick: Moustique's clumsily confessed obsession with whiteness, mixed with his bluster of accusations, empowers the crowd, *for the only time in*

the play, to act in congress without a ringleader, to exert a zeal that even Lestrade admits he cannot stop

(272). Moustique "is caught and punished with a ferocity characteristic of trickster tales" observes Arlene

Keizer, confirming her characterization of Moustique as a trickster (120). The crowd nearly beats

Moustique to death, dispensing an authority violently actualized in Moustique's suffering, and

paradoxically demonstrating that Moustique's most Christ-like moment, so far, occurs when Moustique is

least trying to mimic a messiah. Makak enters the stage to find Moustique abandoned and dying. After

Moustique dies in Makak's arms, his body is carried away by "demons, spirits, a cleft-footed woman, a

man with a goat's head, imps . . . [and the] figure of a woman with a white face and long black hair of the

mask, all singing" (274-275). Their singing is accompanied by drumming and the chorus chanting a

lament into a "frenzied climax" (275), until "Makak writhes on the ground" (275) to close the scene.

Moustique's death is staged as a carnivalesque spectacle, distilled paradoxically from macabre

and libidinal elements of Carnival celebrations, including the symbolic coalescing of the carnival mask

with a white woman, presented here in the company of demoniacs. *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*

affords considerable directorial license here, since the white dancer with the sisal hair need not be the

same woman who plays Makak's apparition: the *dramatis personae* identifies two dancers, and the dancer

here could be the same one who opened the play boogieing with The Baron. If audiences recognize this

dancer as Makak's apparition, her "new" sisal hair evinces a shape-shifting mutability that includes

associations with death and demons. If this dancer is Makak's apparition, such associations should

inflame our apprehensions about his fealty to her. If audiences recognize this dancer as *not* Makak's

apparition, then this Carnival mask, personified as a demoniac dancer comfortable in company of the

damned, appears to be a projection of Moustique's fatal fixation with the object. I prefer the last

interpretation; it affords the Carnival mask a slightly more nuanced range of readings, allowing audiences

to appreciate how differently such symbolically rich props can engage different post-colonial personae.

Moustique confused personhood with impersonation, confused impersonations of power with

appropriations of power, only to be haunted, and ultimately undone, coveting carnivalesque power vested

in a persona he could not impersonate. *Dream* is chiefly a non-realist play, which means audiences will

encounter Moustique again, twice. But his demise here still presents a cautionary tale about pursuing post-colonial personhood and empowerment through Moustique-like mimicry.

In *Dream*'s remaining scenes, Moustique's centrality is largely usurped by Lestrade. Although critics have touched on congruities between Makak and Lestrade—including Patrick Hogan's suspicion that both might be suffering from "mental illness" (*Colonialism and Cultural Identity* 45) and Baugh's belief that Lestrade "is a variant of Makak" (86)—these glimpsed-but-underdeveloped congruities take on fresh significance when explored within the hermeneutic matrix of perichoretic personhood. Whereas Moustique mimicked identifiable fellow characters and knew he was doing so, Lestrade, as the opening scene demonstrated, seems unaware that his failed impersonation of whiteness was ever an impersonation, that his convoluted mimicry of colonial jurisprudence was gibberish. The limits of impersonation vexed Moustique, but Lestrade seems unaware that his character and his power are recognizably knocked-off post-colonial likenesses of colonial power. Clumsy mimicry remains part of Lestrade's trickster repertoire, but Lestrade's chief brand of mimicry now mutates into a more dangerous strain than that pursued by Moustique. Done with his farcical judicial vestments and attempted legalese, Lestrade pursues personhood through a more murderous mimicry of colonial violence.

Dream's next scene opens back in the prison, at night, with Tigre and Souris complaining to the Corporal that their fellow prisoner, Makak, has been moaning, muttering, dancing, singing, crying mostly gibberish, as if he was "living over and over a bad dream he had" (281). Once again, a scene opens with Makak being woken. Makak believes Moustique is dead, but the audience has reason to suspect that the previous episodes involving Moustique may have been performances staged in Makak's dreams while Makak was still imprisoned. Lestrade, for example, has no recollection of Moustique's death, and Tigre's recollections of the event were likely gleaned from listening to Makak incessant nocturnal rambling. Makak, furthermore, cannot remember anything about his messianic calling. Makak offers no defense when Lestrade denigrates him as "old king," "King-Kong," and "insufferable ape" (278-279). In sharp relief to Lestrade's derision, Tigre reminds Makak what the apparition "in the dream" had called him:

Lion, she called you. And lion don't stop to think. The jaw of the lion, that is the opening and

closing of the book of judgement. When the moon in quarter, you know what Africans say. . .That

the jaw of the sun, that is the lion, has eaten the moon. The moon, that is nothing, but . . .a skull . .

.a bone. . . .(283-284)

Tigre's attempt to rattle Makak, besides indicating a fantastical movement of time—wasn't the moon full

a night ago?—also reconfigures Makak's relationship with his moon-associated apparition. In the opening

scene, Makak claimed his apparition summoned him out of his indignity; here, he seems swayed by

Tigre's convoluted formulation that Makak, as a messianic lion, must consume the source of his

empowerment. Tigre's allusions to Eucharistic violence quite seriously distort the lion-lamb paradox, for

it is the lion that must be consumed. Similarly, Tigre's attempts to incite Makak to violence –"How else

you prove your name is lion, unless you do one bloody, golden, dazzling thing, eh?. . . You bastard son of

a black gorilla, you listening?" (283-284)—reproduces the Christological "error" Makak advocated in the

opening scene: unlike the lion-lamb, whose person includes both identities, Makak believes identifying as

a lion allows him to escape, not paradoxically embody, his stigmatized simian name.

Keeping with the trend of previous scenes, the realism in this scene is also disrupted by

carnivalesque tropes. Here, however, the realism-puncturing allusion to Carnival takes a more sinister

shape. Makak had never been given possession of the Carnival mask Lestrade found on his person during

the opening scene, yet Souris suddenly notices Makak is holding the "same mask again" (284). Tigre,

noting "the moon unsheathe its blade," asks Souris to look again, and Souris's astonishment—"A knife!"

(284)—echoes the audience's. The mask has morphed into a knife; what had failed to confer personhood

through guile had been mystically carved into an instrument promising personhood through violence.

"Look how it shines," coos Tigre, "Think of the bright blood! Think like the lion that is dazzled by pity

for only a second!" (284) Goaded by Tigre, Makak tricks and stabs Lestrade, crying, "Blood! Blood!

Blood! Lion . . . Lion.. I am . . . a lion" (285). Tigre correlated blood with being lion-like for purely

immediate and instrumental purposes—escaping imprisonment—but this coalescing of symbols seeps

much more deeply into Makak's consciousness. Before leaving the jailhouse with Tigre and Souris,

Makak looks over Lestrade's bleeding body and, "near weeping with rage" (286), reproduces and extends Tigre's distortion of Eucharistic violence. Makak believes he has killed Lestrade, and in doing so he has killed God—"God dead, and his law there bleeding"—rendering Lestrade's blood salvific: "Drink it! Drink it! Drink . . . Christian, cannibal, I will drink blood. You will drink it with me. . ." (286). Makak's belief seems firmly rooted in the zeitgeist of the play, for Lestrade frequently correlated or confused God, the law and whiteness. And Souris later confesses a deeply seeded fear that draws on these same correlations and confusions:

> When I was a boy…God was like a big white man, a big white man I was afraid of. . . And that is what they teach me since I small. To be black like coal, and to dream of milk. To love God, and obey the white man (290).

Makak believes he liberated his fellow subalterns from being shamed as "Apes without law" because he has killed the law. Makak leaves the jailhouse identifying as a "lion" (286), asserting his personhood by assuming a Christological title, altogether neglecting the paradoxical title such assumptions necessitate, especially within Christologically-intoned affirmations of personhood.

After Makak and crew exit, Lestrade rises, retrieves a knife and rifle, complains a little of his "flesh wound" (286), and drops one of the play's most prescient metaphors:

> Let them run ahead. Then I'll have good reason for shooting them down. Sharpeville? Attempting to escape. Attempting to escape. Attempting to escape from the prison of their lives. That's the most dangerous crime. It brings about revolution. (288)

Lestrade, addressing the audience,[94] tells us that the prison set on stage is a symbol of wider imprisonment, but lest we diminish the set as "merely" a symbol, Lestrade assigns it a specific, painful, realist allusion: the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, where police shot at a group of anti-Apartheid protestors, killing nearly seventy people. Attempting to escape from this symbolic prison, according to Lestrade, is the *most* dangerous crime—more dangerous than any crime that could justify imprisonment in the first place. The scene ends with Lestrade leaving to pursue his escaped prisoners, armed with a rationale and the intent to kill. Besides the knife Makak mysteriously finds himself in

possession of, the scene's dearth of fantastical embellishments allows its violence and promise of revenge to be performed with chilling realism. This realism continues into the early moments of the next scene, in which Makak, Souris, and Tigre are in the forest of Monkey Mountain. Makak believes they are beginning their journey to Africa; Tigre and Souris, however, are scheming after money Makak earlier claimed to have hidden in the mountain. As Tigre says to Souris, "Let's mix ourselves in his madness. Let's dissolve in his dream" (289).

From this point, whatever realism the previous scenes have achieved erodes steadily as the play foregroundss its fantastical elements. After some absence, the chorus returns to accent Makak's romantic musings about returning to Africa (291). While pursuing Makak, Lestrade confronts Basil who reveals his penchant for trickster-like wordplay when he tells Lestrade, "I do not exist. A figment of the imagination, a banana of the mind. . ." (298). Audiences have reasons to believe Basil: Lestrade compliments him for his verbal acumen after figuring out Basil's pun, even though Lestrade had earlier used the same pun, "A figment of your imagination," on Souris (278). In a partial reversal of the opening scene, Makak, Tigre, and Souris are not able to see Lestrade's "figment"—although the audience still can.[95] This device makes the audience party to Lestrade's imagination in much the same way it had made us party to Makak's. In fact, the scene not only continues to paint Basil as suspiciously unreal, it continues to present Basil as a corollary to Makak's apparition. Indeed, Taylor credits the Baron, not Makak's apparition, as Makak believes, for empowering Makak's healing of Josephus (214). Lestrade's reaction to becoming the Baron's *zombi*, for example, has troubling semblances to Makak's enchantment by his mask-moon apparition: both describe their experiences using symbols of feet and roots, and both are beguiled by the novelty of "race pride."[96] Like Makak's "apparition," who inspired Makak to reimagine his identity, Lestrade's "figment" drives Lestrade to become Makak's most fanatical disciple, albeit a disciple who paradoxically controls his master. In this scene, Basil even *answers* Makak's earlier petition to his apparition for rescue—"Appear to my enemies" and "slaughter" them (228). When Tigre threatens

Makak's life, Basil the "figment" is suddenly "real" enough to distract Tigre long enough for Lestrade to kill Tigre and save Makak's life.

Makak's dream, however, withers when facing the barrel of Tigre's gun: against its portent, Makak holds out the Carnival mask (from where did it appear?), concedes to the emptiness of his regal dreams: "I was a king among shadows. Either the shadows were real, and I was no king, or it was my own kingliness that created the shadows" (305)—and prays that the dream in which he now believes he is trapped will end (305). Makak, broken and disoriented, is easily manipulated by Lestrade: "He's a shadow now…I'll take over" (306-307). Although the style of Lestrade's trickster schemes are not Moustique's, Lestrade soon assumes his role as Moustique's successor: that is, as Makak's puppeteer guised as his chief disciple, playing the masterful trick of subjugating Makak while lionizing him. Basil's materialization further immerses the audience into a narrative perspective graved in Lestrade's imagination, over which the trickster Baron has claimed jurisdiction. Whereas Basil's distinct costume explicitly signals his correlation with the Baron, Lestrade's persona, as yet another iteration of Èsù, implicitly subsides within the matrix of signifiers the Baron commands—"half"-white, "half"-black, a straddler, neither milk nor coal, day nor night, lion nor monkey, a straddler mulatto (284). Èsù, like Lestrade, is frequently described as a straddler, a trickster with feet planted unevenly in human and divine realms (Gates, "A Myth of Origins" 162). That is why Èsù limps, like Moustique. And that is why Lestrade, despite seeming an unlikely successor to Moustique, can assume the role while sustaining a connotative continuity between performers. Their limp and straddle are functions of the same Èsù-Elegba totem. Just as Moustique, in Makak's name, had roused crowds into carnivalesque revelry, Lestrade spurs the play into its most carnivalesque scene, in which Lestrade commands the lion's share of dialogue. The next scene opens with the very pomp Lestrade envisions in this scene's closing speech, calling for "splendour, barbarism, majesty, noise, slogans, parades," plastering "walls with pictures of the leader," and a petition to the moon—the apparition—to "magnify our shadows . . . if only for a moment" (307).

The antepenultimate scene of the play is staged in an Africanesque setting, replete with a "procession of warriors, chiefs, and the wives of Makak in splendid tribal costumes . . . chanting to

drums" (307). Lestrade's petition to the moon recalls an Afro-Caribbean slave tradition of "midnight,

moonlight performances," which "grew into a secret cult of ceremony accompanied with all the pomp and

pageantry of royal court life" (Garuba 247). In Trinidad, these secret ceremonies did much more than

provide a politically impotent, imaginary distraction: they began mediating "everyday relationships"

between slaves during the daytime until "moonlight performances . . . became so widespread and ominous

that the colonial authorities. . . imposed capital punishment on some of the major *actors*" (Garuba 247,

emphasis in original). The scene also betokens a Carnival ritual of crowning the slave or jester king, the

high point of Carnival according to Bakhtin (124–25). Walcott laces these antecedents into the pomp of

the scene's opening, relying on sardonic humour that cuts through much of the scene, stirring nervous

laughter at a performance that paradoxically pairs grandeur with the grotesque.

The chorus opens this scene, showering Makak with abstractly Africanesque titles and praises,

although their pairing of "who" as an anaphora followed by a poetic parataxis—"Who has held captivity

captive,/ Who had bridled the wind,/ Who has fathered the brood of the crocodile" (309)—recalls Allan

Ginsberg's 1956 poem, "Howl," whose cadence was braced by this same anaphora-parataxis

combination: "who bared their brain to Heaven . . . / who were expelled from the academies . . . / who

cowered in unshaven rooms" (Ginsberg). The paradox here is as delightful as it is telling: Makak, the

herald of essentialized blackness, is exalted in chants that betray a rhythmic kinship with the work of a

gay, Jewish-American, Buddhist Beat poet (Collier 207; 381, 383).[97] The rest of the scene continues in

this vein, riddled with narrative and performative incongruities that accentuate the futility of the scene's

grotesque preoccupation: staging a violent purging of "whiteness" to secure an unadulterated "blackness."

Makak, however, does not want to be here; despondency from the previous scene still weighs on him,

despite his regal entrance. "I am only a shadow," he declares and, ignoring Lestrade's immediate

admonishment to be quiet, describes himself as, "A hollow God. A phantom" (311)—at which point

Lestrade quickly summons the throng and begins the boisterous trial.

The narrative action quickly proceeds as Lestrade, along with the attending "Tribes" and Basil

(who everyone can now see) orchestrate a trial that declares guilty several major figures of Western

politics, including imperialist Cecil Rhodes and abolitionist William Wilberforce (311-312). True, ceremonies associated with the Baron can include "animal sacrifice . . . as ritualistic cleansing [accompanied by] music and dance" (Ross and Ross 789), but the ceremony staged in *Dream*, led by Basil and his *zombi* (this is, Lestrade) sacrifice humans in a "ritualistic cleansing" of whiteness, which slyly draws on but distorts Voudoun practices as strikingly as Makak has drawn on but distorted the trickster Christ paradox. Lestrade's motives in this scene may be manifold, but I suspect Lestrade is craftily trying to appease and escape Basil in a scheme that divests this "trial" of due process and pins final culpability for its slaughter on Makak. Laconically, Makak oversees the trial as titular judge, nodding to sanction whatever decrees the trial's orchestrators demand. When Moustique, thought to be dead, is brought before Makak "bleeding and broken" (314), Makak finds himself having to defend the accusations levelled against his old friend. "You have betrayed our dream," (314) charges Lestrade, but Moustique counters by charging Makak of betraying his dream, of being high on power, of still being Lestrade's monkey and nothing like the lion he imagined he would be (315).

After Makak sentences Moustique to his second death in the play, Lestrade finally summons the apparition of the white woman who everyone can now see—"Plain as the moon," in Souris's words (317)—just as they can now see Basil. Lestrade insists Makak must kill that which he believes called him to power if he wishes to "sleep in peace" (317) and, more tellingly, to avoid becoming "what I was, neither one thing nor the other. Kill her! Kill her!" (319) Makak tries to question the apparition, but she remains silent as a mask. Faced with her speechlessness, Lestrade's anxiety betrays him as he testily urges Makak to murder quickly, now dubbing Makak "nigger" instead of addressing him, as he had moments ago, as "prince." Lestrade convinces Makak that the apparition represents "an image of your longing," the embodiment of colonial culture—"the law, religion, paper, art"—that has made Makak "find himself unbearable" (319). Lestrade argues she is impeding his ability "to discover the beautiful depth of your blackness," that is she is "the white light that paralyzed your mind and led you into this confusion" (319). Audiences can be forgiven for trusting Lestrade's analysis, for it summarily poeticizes Fanon's diagnoses

of racialized pathologies, and the legitimacy of Lestrade's arguments seem buttressed by Walcott's choice

of the following quote from Sartre's prologue to *Wretched of the Earth* for his play's précis:

> Thus in certain psychoses the hallucinated person, tired of always being insulted by his demon,
>
> one fine day starts hearing the voice of an angel who pays him compliments…This is a defense,
>
> but it also the end of the story. The self is dissociated, and the patient heads for madness. (*The*
>
> *Wretched of the Earth* liii)

True, Makak's eidolon, as he remembered her, in many ways fits the description of such an "angel." But

we have good reason to suspect that the apparition personified in the play, the one now before us, has

never been that eidolon.

First, Makak had stated, at least twice, that he was catalyzed by his eidolon's words*. Makak*

spends far more time emphasizing what the eidolon sung to him, including calling him by his real name,

than discussing her racialization or any of its attendant associations inventoried by Lestrade. Makak had

been empowered by her voice, yet throughout this performance she remains mysteriously speechless. The

apparition seems, more likely, to be a personification of his empty mask than of his eidolon. More

importantly, our certainty about her identity should be soured *because* of the interpretation Lestrade

aggressively tenders to allay Makak's doubts. Lestrade has presented himself as a menacing clown, a

manipulator, a hypocrite, a spinner of half-truths, and a *zombi* of The Baron: so why should we believe

him? Why now; why this *one* time? What reason has he given us to trust his analysis, let alone enlist his

exegesis as unproblematically reliable, if not authoritative, as many readings *Dream* are wont (Crossley

28–29; Baugh 85; Haney 95–96; Thieme 225)? "Like all successful propagandists," cautions Hogan in his

exposition of this moment, "Lestrade mixes truth with lies" (*Colonialism and Cultural Identity* 77).[98]

Given Lestrade's record, I am as inclined to believe him here as I am to believe the pre-dawn Twitter

rants of a pathologically lying politician. Perhaps Lestrade is projecting his anxieties on Makak—"I too

have longed for her," he confesses (319)—as Moustique had earlier projected his anxieties on the

aggrieved market crowd. But whatever Lestrade's motives may be,[99] are we surprised that Makak, who

has already been manipulated by Moustique, Tigre, and Lestrade, would again fall for this ruse? Tigre had already tricked Makak into trying to kill Lestrade, promising him empowerment; Lestrade successfully pulls the same trick here, turning Makak with eerie ease into someone capable of attempting double murder (or triple, if you count his assenting to Moustique's execution). "Indeed," observes Nana Wilson-Tagoe, "the entire unraveling of Makak's dream is a progress from one kind of manipulation to another" (262).

So when Lestrade reduces the identity of the apparition into signifiers of conflicted whiteness— "the wife of the devil, the white witch . . . all that is pure…Venus, the Virgin, Sleeping Beauty" (319), that is all it takes for Makak to confuse the person before him with something merely symbolic, like a mask. Makak, whose "sword is the moon in its crescent" (309), as the choir earlier sang, soon finds himself on stage with only the apparition, descending into the paradox of committing lion-like violence only when he most resembles Lestrade's "monkey." Makak shakes off his regal robes, wields a crescent-shaped blade, and declares himself "free" because he has bought into Lestrade's contrivance of freedom. Makak then beheads the woman, descending into a stereotype "old in societies of Western civilization," featured prominently in Greek mythology, of the "dark villain or black beast" threatening "the white goddess" (Tafira 141). The decapitation is a performance of gruesome violence arising when persons can be confused for masks, when persons can be reduced to symbols. Makak's confusion, of course, is also ours, since *Dream* ventures the difficult trick of casting a persona as a personification of a mask.

Perichoretic thought, furthermore, seems to anathematize constructions of "freedom" achieved through Makak's particular violence. Sharply contrasting Flett's description of "the human person" who recognizes their perichoretic constitution within "a network of relationships" (125; see also Ware 107), Makak beheads the "white goddess" when other personae have left the stage, typifying the movement towards his estrangement that has been building throughout the scene. When Makak's severs the white woman's head, he severs the head of the figure who is a personification of a mask, a paradoxical personification of a persona, his incarnation of agitated, anguished ambiguity regarding post-colonial personhood. Makak executes her in a violent pursuit of a "clarity" defined under colonial terms, failing to

realize that the post-colonial *prosopon* thrives in complexity. When attending to post-colonial

personhood, ambiguity can be valued as a resource that not only enables perichoretic personhood, but also

questions how "colonial/imperial reality does not reflect the perichoretic ideal" (Travis 135). Makak's

beheading of the human persona presents a "return to Egypt" moment (Exodus 14:12; 16:3), in which

Makak's identity craves the deranged clarity of colonial modality, a clarity achieved through violence,

through fatally mutilating the other, through radically undermining provisos for the post-colonial

prosopon. As Manoussakis compellingly explains:

> *Prosopon* strongly implies the reciprocity of gaze through which the self is interpellated by the
>
> other, and ultimately, "othered." The antonym of *prosopon* is again described in the Greek
>
> language by term *atomon*. *Prosopon* and *atomon* are the only existential possibilities open to a
>
> human being. However, to be an *atomon* means to be in fragmentation (*a* – and *temno*, to cut;
>
> therefore, that a-tomic is that which cannot be cut any further.) . . .The individual stands in sharp
>
> opposition to the *prosopon*. Where the latter gather and unites, the former cuts off, separates,
>
> alienates. Where, then, does the individual belong? One would say to Hades. Hades, for the
>
> Greeks, is the place of non-being, the underworlds, the place where there is no *seeing*. A-*ides*
>
> means the place where there is neither gaze nor face, where the possibility of seeing the Other,
>
> face-to-face, has disappeared and along it with the dynamics of being a *prosopon* and of being as
>
> such. (Manoussakis, "From Exodus to Eschaton: On the God Who May Be" 101; see also
>
> Bamford 58; Polkinghorne 126)

Unlike all other scenes, which conclude with a carnivalesque allusion, this scene ends in a silent blackout.

Others cannot be seen. Gazes cannot be met, face-to-face. Makak, far from being free, appears arrested in

the *atomon* of his character.

Makak's beheading of the apparition requires another word because my reading of this moment

respectfully parts from readings of this moment that seem critical to many, if not most, scholarly readings

of *Dream*.[100] These readings of *Dream*, significant differences between them notwithstanding, variously

suggest Makak's violence was somehow sanctifying or emancipating. This body of interpretation leaves

me nervous for a few reasons. First, in terms of rhetorical aura, because these readings liberally invoke Christian soteriological nomenclature to construe the apparition's execution as imperative to deliverance and empowerment, they unwittingly consecrate the passion of the apparition, through connotation and intimation, as propitiatively Christ-like.[101] And Makak doesn't need a white messiah.

Second, in focusing hermeneutic attention on what the apparition symbolizes, in order to make some sense of Makak's violence, I think we are missing the more urgent, exegetical priority of what is on stage: a woman is being butchered. Readings of *Dream* that focus on perichoresis need not transmute expositions of Makak's misogynistic violence into broader apologetics for post-colonial violence. The poetics of perichoresis, which differently conjugate relationships between key personae and symbols in *Dream*, need not engender readings of the play that pivot on accurately distilling the *consequence* of Makak's brutality. We need not modulate the horror we have witnessed into a hallowed moment in Makak's empowerment. Makak's atrocity remains an atrocity unalleviated, a nightmarish demonstration of rage ensuing from notions of personhood so depleted and distressed that distinctions between persons and masks blur dangerously. Indeed, Makak's disturbingly purposeless, misogynistic violence stages a pervasive post-colonial problem, one that riddles the play itself. *Dream*'s chief feminine figuration never speaks, and other women characters are bit-playing dupes and gossips (257-259). Today, almost fifty years after the play was first performed, *Dream* presents a cautionary tale regarding masculinist pursuits of post-colonial empowerment, ones in which women's voices are either silent (silenced?) or caricatured.

The most prescient meaning I can find in Makak's violence is the affect and horror of its raw disorientation. The silent apparition, whose personhood is as unrecognized and elusive as Makak's, screams her still trenchant censure across half a century. Dreams of post-colonial empowerment, impoverished of feminist critique, chase flaccid ambitions whose incompleteness proves humiliating and brutal. Interestingly, Keizer traces *Dream*'s tendentious gendering to its invocation of trickster figures, whose "particular mode of Caribbean masculinity has little to offer in the future and must be superseded"; figures mired "within the black Caribbean masculinist tradition" that envisions "slavery and colonialism as struggles of wit and strength between men, in which women play primarily symbolic roles" (Keizer

119).With Taylor, Keizer suggests that *Dream* presents a post-colonial hope born from abandoning the Manichean ethos of plantation trickster tales that prized the immediacy of survival. On the one hand, I find Keizer's highlighting of gender in *Dream* vital, and I concur with her and Taylor regarding the suspect applicability of trickster ethics, forged for the survival by the colonized, within post-colonial environs attempting to prize sovereignty, solidarity and sustainability. Do we need to defend the post-colonial utility of colonial-era tricksters any more than we need to defend the post-colonial viability of colonial-era Christs? On the other hand, I contend that the problem with the trickster figures to which *Dream* alludes is that their tired, predictable tricks are not tricky *enough* to outfox post-colonial challenges, including critical challenges regarding engendered dispensations of empowerment.

In this respect, *Dream* suggests empowerment pursued through another's subjugation strains after forms of colonial power too stale, too rotted to nurture post-colonial healing or sustain post-colonial health. The post-colonial world is a world turned upside-down and spun around, a dizzying world, a hungry world, recovering from the depravations of colonial deception while surviving the ruses of neo-colonial puppeteers. When renegotiating colonial relationships between identity and difference within the purview of gendered post-colonial personhood, we need to consider counsel born of a trickster's cunning. *Dream* revitalizes its trickster figures craftily, drawing on their trickster logic—with its penchant for shiftiness and ambiguity—to grind discursive regimes and the binaries on which they depend into paradoxes enabling perichoretic personhood. The play's intimation of such personhood, whose "wholeness…can be achieved only through the relation to the other," (Volf 188) imagines a kind of personhood recognized for its feminist possibilities (Lytle; Bacon; J. M. Buck 50; Edwards; P. Fox 137; Groppe; Hackett; Kolimon; Meehan 86; Rees; Schaab; Gifford 122). *Dream*'s passaging of personhood remains admittedly incomplete, teasing us with possibilities that it excites but does not actualize. Nevertheless, the possibilities *are* exciting, and they present themselves most vividly in the play's epilogue, to which we will now turn.

3.   Culmination and Conclusion: Makak's Awakening

Like so many previous scenes, the crucial epilogue of *Dream* opens with Makak waking up. This time, he is not roused by other characters but awakes calling out his real name, Felix Hobain. The scene resembles the first scene of the play, involving almost all the same characters, except this scene is entirely stripped of its carnivalesque embellishments. Tigre is alive, Moustique is alive, and Lestrade was never stabbed. Nobody escaped. Hobain is able to answer questions more cogently than "Makak" could. When Hobain calls out for "General Tiger" and "General Rat" (titles he had bestowed on Tigre and Souris in a previous scene), he prefaces his question with the confession that he may be disoriented because he "cannot sleep" (322), something which Tigre immediately confirms (322). Even the off-stage singing of the chorus is explained as all-night singing coming from the Church of Revelation (324). This scene is the least dream-like of any of the play's scenes, and audiences could well assume that now Makak has really woken up and what we witnessed before was not only a dream, but dreams and visions embedded and entangled in visions and dreams. Dreams carry much ontological weight in many of the Caribbean's religious traditions, including Christianity, so I can appreciate why many readings of *Dream* treat events leading up to this epilogue as chronologically causal; that is, readings that posit that everything audiences witnessed before this epilogue had an impact on Makak's persona as encountered in this epilogue. But what if this epilogue does not represent the conclusion of a narrative that culminates in Makak's transformed character? What if this epilogue represents an escape from a nightmare, escape from a grotesque carnival governed by masquerade and manipulation, coloured by the blood of Moustique, Lestrade, Tigre and a voiceless woman?

Reading this epilogue as a waking escape, an elusion of an illusion, invites a critical reinterpretation of the play's key tricksters, a reinterpretation that allows audiences to imagine Moustique, Lestrade, and Makak as characters whose personhood emerges through their paradoxical, perichoretic communion. In Makak's nightmare, relationships between these characters were premised on contempt, control and arrays of explicitly confusing, implicitly contested claims over common symbols critical to each character's construction. In waking life, we witness the vitality of these shared symbols enriched for a persona when Makak witnesses the animation of these symbols in the characters' fellow personae.

Unnerving, ultimately murderous relationships premised on contempt, control and cunning now seemed long-beguiled by a radically egalitarian Carnival impulse: a promise of promiscuously "open" personae, personae gyrating into perichoresis, personae catalyzed by vivifying other personae. *Dream*'s epilogue shares a promising glimpse into the post-colonial potential presented by this tricky pursuit of perichoretic personhood, even when dealing with its motley lot of melancholic and manipulative trickster mimics. We shall now, finally, turn out attention to the reinterpretation of these tricksters in the light of epilogue's revelations.

First, consider Moustique. In Makak's dream, Moustique mimics Makak to exploit what he recognizes is a popular, desperate belief that alleviating suffering requires a certain kind of miraculous, messianic intervention. If Makak is a Christ figure, as his Christologically-intoned title suggests, then it is easy to read Moustique as an anti-Christ. Like the anti-Christ of Revelation, Moustique wins followers by pretending to appear like the Christ (Revelation 13:11). Furthermore, unlike the Christ who gives up his blood for his followers to drink, Moustique, the mosquito, is a bloodsucker. After Basil had exposed him for posing as Makak, Moustique paradoxically continued to associate himself with Makak, the crowd's expected Christ figure, while ridiculing Christological designations:

> [*Pushing* BASIL *aside*]
>
> You know who I am? You want to know who I am? Makak! Makak! or Moustique, is not the
>
> same nigger? What you want me to say? 'I am the resurrection, I am the life?' 'I am the green
>
> side of Jordan,' or that 'I am a prophet stoned by Jerusalem'? (272-273)

But on this Sunday morning in which the play's epilogue is set, Moustique *is* "a prophet stoned by Jerusalem," "the resurrection . . . the life," and a saviour. In Hobain's dream, Moustique was martyred, twice, for speaking truth to flawed visions of empowerment. First, he is killed after he spits at a market crowd, having accused them of equating the measure of their empowerment with the measure by which they could be freed from their blackness. Then he is killed a second time, after he castigates Makak for equating the measure of his empowerment with the measure by which he could be purged of his whiteness. In this epilogue, Moustique arrives at the prison very much alive, letting audiences know that

the violence of Hobain's dream does not have the final word on Moustique's fate. Indeed, the "resurrected" Moustique arrives at the prison to *save* Felix Hobain, telling Lestrade, "You must forgive him" (325). Moustique even offers to pay the price for whatever transgressions Hobain committed—"If is any damage, Corporal, I will pay you for it" (325). Moustique *is* "the green side of Jordan" insofar as he tells Lestrade, "Let me take him where he belong" (335) before ushering Hobain, in Hobain's words, "to the green beginning of this world" (326)—a phrase that delicately intones the a familiar apocalyptic promise: "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5 ISV). Moustique is the "same nigger" as Makak in that he is no mere pretender or mimic messiah: unlike his character in Hobain's dream, Moustique is not simply pretending to be Christ-like.

Second, consider Lestrade. In the epilogue, Lestrade shows some of the brutishness that he had demonstrated towards Tigre and Souris in the opening scene (323), but the Lestrade we encounter in the epilogue explicitly identifies with Hobain and Moustique's suffering: "Here is a prison. *Our* life is a prison" (325, emphasis mine). As a mulatto who enjoys more power within their post-colonial milieu than the *charbonniers* Moustique and Hobain, Lestrade nevertheless understands that his lot in life is lashed to theirs. In Christological terms, he realizes he is of the same "substance" as Moustique and Hobain. In this scene, Lestrade sets Hobain free, telling him he spent the night in jail because had vandalized the shop of Felicien Alcindor, insulted a Market Inspector, quarreled, preached, called a "poor carpenter an agent of death," and got drunk in public. "Before you cause more damage, I bring you in here," explains Lestrade, speaking in practical terms and citing local causes, including Makak's protection, for Makak's imprisonment: quite a contrast from the grandiose speeches about English and Roman law Lestrade made in the first scene. He even offers Hobain some comfort, referring to Hobain twice as a "friend": "You had a rough night, friend. But is a first offence" (323). Upon releasing Hobain, Lestrade actually instructs him to go home: "There, Monkey Mountain. Walk through the quiet village. I will explain everything to Alcindor. Sometimes, there is so much pressure…Go on. You are free (324).

Lestrade has been telling Makak what to do throughout the play. He had Makak perform like a circus monkey in the first scene, then later pressured Makak into overseeing and committing murder. But

this final command is benign, entirely in line with what Makak had requested in the first few lines of the play itself. Indeed, when Makak first asks to go home in the opening scene, Lestrade mockingly asks him if his home is in Africa, the site of essentialized blackness, as it has been imagined and presented in much of the play. Here, in the epilogue, Lestrade points to Monkey Mountain when he identifies Hobain's home—that is, Hobain's actual home in the Caribbean; a home that needs neither the sacrifice of a white goddess or the opulence of an exoticized African court to free it from the paradoxes of those who inhabit it. Lestrade expresses care for Hobain's well-being, counselling Hobain to walk through the quiet village, safe from those whom he might have offended yesterday. Lestrade even offers to act an intercessor with Alcindor, releasing Hobain of his transgressions against Alcindor. His words, "Sometimes, there is so much pressure," (324) anticipate Moustique's compassionate plea—"Sometimes, a man can take no more" (325)—made just moments later. The police officer, the jailor, now intercedes on behalf of the guilty and sets the captive free.

Third, consider Makak. He is awake. For the first time, audiences are witnessing the narrative unfold outside the mask of Makak's dream, but not entirely outside the orbit of Makak's perichoretic persona. During his nightmare, inside which audiences were locked, Makak's fellow characters were merely personifications of his contradictions; now, we may differently experience Makak as radically intersubjective locus for his fellow characters' personae. I agree with Tejumola Olaniyan that in Makak we witness a persona "gradually negotiating his way towards self-definition," (156) although I would qualify "self-definition" in paradoxically perichoretic terms: "the self is a pluralistic personality of integrity; particularity always arises within a matrix of interconnection" (Medley 99). To borrow from the poetics of meditations on perichoresis, in Makak audiences encounter an "inimitably relational, personal plentitude" (Boyer and Hall 73) that "through perichoresis (interpenetration) . . . bears the others in itself" (Boff 91). Makak's character assays a personhood that is "essentially relation-oriented" (Turner 216) without signalling a "loss of identity" or "personal consciousness" but their "potentiation" (Horujy 159). For perichoretic personhood seeks its fulfilment in "Other-being" (Horujy 127), as evinced in the epilogue's vivification of the lion-monkey paradox as the fount of paradigmatic perichoresis.

Makak awakes in this epilogue calling out his Christian name: Felix Hobain. One the one hand, Felix" not only suggests "happy," as in *felix culpa,* "happy or blessed fault" (Rutledge 432), the term's allusions include the "Easter Proclamation" of Roman Catholic liturgies that explicitly tie the term to the Christ—"*O felix culpa, quæ talem ac tantum méruit habére Redemptórem!;* O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!" (Ostrowski). On the other hand, "Felix" also comes close to punning "feline," which suggests that Makak remains slyly lion-like. What is more, in the closing passage of the play, Felix identifies himself as "Makak," which is not a negation of the lion-inclined "Felix" but a paradoxical collocation of these "natures" within his persona. Consider: when Felix claims Makak as a title he transfers explicit, power-laden associations between "lion" and "roots" in Revelation 5:5 to his lion-like title: where the "Lion of Judah" rooted his power in ancestry, "Makak of Monkey Mountain" roots his empowerment in the "ground" (*Dream* 327) of the Caribbean. Similarly, since Felix is also a variation of "Felicien"—that is, the first name of the shopkeeper whose premises Makak had vandalized—Felix bears within his identification a stigmatizing contiguity with a person subjected to his manic violence. Whereas in Revelation 5:6 it is the lamb-called-lion who bears scars of violence, in *Dream* it is the monkey-called-lion who intimates that violence directed at Felicien was, ultimately, not just violence directed at an "other," but also violence self-inflicted. Makak replenishes the paradox of the "Lion of Judah" by reminding us the title, without its paradoxical pairing, represents a one-dimensional figuration of power. Makak has had little semblance to the quick-witted signifying monkey trickster or the majestic Lion of Judah, until now. These identifications encounter each other, and bring each other into surprising, mutual manifestation as the "lion" sets forth to conquer colonial deliriums of personhood, not by consuming the consciousness of others, but though the perichoretic trick of extending persona beyond individuation in a manner "that neither neutralizes nor synthesizes" identities (Volf 186). In Trinitarian terms, Makak's trick evinces personhood in which, as Volf describes it,

> distinct persons are internally constituted by the indwelling of other persons in them. The personal
>
> identity of each is unthinkable without the presence of others in each; such presence of others is
>
> part and parcel of the identity of each. (87)

We witness this dynamic, movingly, when Makak's antagonistically-positioned personifications of a mimic monkey (Moustique) and a violent lion (Lestrade) are transfigured into personae who, in Boff's and Turner's respective reflections on perichoretic personhood, "are not simply turned in on themselves" but "turned toward others" (Boff 5).

Characters who once seemed like self-serving tricksters nurture a revolutionary, perichoretic personhood through their mutual concern for Makak. In a play saturated with pageantry and spectacle, these expressions are as fleeting as they are gentle, as gentle as they are courageous, and as courageous as they are crucial. Indeed, I posit this moment as Makak's perichoretic apotheosis. And here is why.

"Then the king will say," attributes Matthew's Gospel to Jesus, "I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:40 GNB). Jesus, "the king," reveals much about his identity through this eschatological parable, including a messianic office meshed with a trickster-like penchant for disguise and punch-line surprises: when the audience before the king confesses having never had such a relationship with him, the king divulges, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:34-40 ESV). Lestrade took care of Makak; Moustique visited Makak in prison: both directed their concern toward one counted among "the least of these" who, paradoxically, is also kingly and Christ-like. "Jesus in disguise," as Mother Teresa and others have described encountering a trickster king in the "least of these," the "king not in the noble and the great of this world" (Kynes 157). Lest I be charged with hanging my analysis on single parable of the Christ's disguises, consider: the Christological impetus of this parable has been venerated in a long history of Christian homiletics (Severson),[102] in the Christocentric mysticism of Francis of Assisi (Campolo and Darling 37–38),[103] in contemporary Christological reflections on personhood, and *especially* in post-colonial theologies. A brief discussion of the last two will sufficiently clarify the consequences of making this verse the polestar of a Christology, including consequences bearing on my reading of Makak's Christological apotheosis.

John Monoussakis roots his understanding of "*prosopon*" as "the divine manifest in the 'least of these,' the othered" (*After God* 7). For Manoussakis, "the *prosopon* is . . . one-as-another and the other as oneself" (*After God* 7); "the relational character of *prosopon* [is] being-toward-the-face-of-the-Other"

(*After God* xx). Similarly, Kearney notes that the "invocation of the surprising divinity of the *hospes* [Gr. 'stranger']" is emphasized four times in this parable of the Christ's disguises. "Christ's *persona*" in this passage invites an emancipatory apotheosis through which (referencing a Gerard Manley Hll poem from 1918 "As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies dráw flame")[104] the self is no longer confined inside its being, "Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*" Instead, the Christological persona seeks justice in a different kind of recognition, appearing in "God's eye what in God's eye he is—/ Christ—for Christ plays in ten thousand places,/. . .To the father through the features of men's faces" (Kearney 46; Hopkins). By recognizing Christ in "the least of these" a persona turns from retreating into an *atomon* and instead participates in a pluralized, perichoretic Christic persona that can be recognized in "ten thousand places." Indeed, cautions J.E. Clemons, writing in a Caribbean context, "*unless* we did live in this way"— recognizing Christ in "the least of these"—"we should constantly be refusing to love him, and would remain alone in darkness" (46). Also writing from a Caribbean context, Jean Beedoe's exposition of the parable— "emphasis is placed on ordinary actions and on the routine exchanges of the day" (72)—further amps Kearney's cautioning about "the least of these":

> God speaks not through monuments of power and pomp, but in stories and acts of love and justice, the giving to the least of creatures . . . stories and acts which bear testimony—as transfiguring gestures do—to that God of little things that comes and goes, like the thin small voice, like the burning bush, like the words made flesh, like the wind that blows where it will. (51)

Not in the rising prison cells of the opening scene, not in the healing of Josephus, not in the pomposity of his pyrrhic Africanesque court, not in his sentencing of Moustique, not in his stabbing of Lestrade, not in his beheading of the "white goddess": Makak's post-colonial apotheosis, his revelation as a Christ-like paradox, occurs through these revolutionary gestures of compassion that risk being missed like thin whispers lost in the wind. As such, these fleeting, Fifth-Business[105] moments cleverly kindle

subversive transfigurations of power and personhood right under the noses of those who recognize power principally in its colonial figurations.

Perhaps the subversive potential of recognition is why many post-colonial theologies confirm Kristine Suna-Koro argument that the "linchpin of post-colonial orthodoxy," including Trinitarian understandings of God, can be found in Jesus's identification with the "least of these"—"the widows, the orphans, the strangers, and all those whose spirits, souls, and bodies have been broken by the empires of conquest and cruelty" (251; see also Mannion and Mudge 450; Reddie 28; D. J. Lee 23; Fensham 28; Rieger, *Globalization and Theology* 39; Tan). People like Makak. People who might be counted, to borrow from Grau's trickster Christology, as a "scandalously different Christ, a rather suspect and marginal 'persona'. . . for divine agency" appearing "as holy fool, divine trickster" (*Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption* 221; see also Grau, "Divine Commerce: A Post-colonial Christology for Times of Neocolonial Empire" 177). Within a Caribbean context, Jesus's identification with the "least of these" evokes the power of "relationship," a power that is "centred in the theology" which strives to recognize "every person" as the Imago Dei of Trinitarian communion "is also in a relational community with God through every relationship he or she enters in life" (Beedoe 72).

This perichoretic recognition often draws on the image of the "new Adam," whose messianic personhood divulges itself in its fellowship with the "least of these," as post-colonial feminist Ashmita Khasnabish notes:

> God as Trinity is not only the perichoretic community of love but it is also a messianic community. The perichoretic community of the Trinitarian love is a messianic fellowship because of its eschatological openness to include within itself the excluded—the detritus of life—and through their inclusion in the messianic fellowship of life offer them redemption. (85; see also Sahinidou 121; Hinkley 219; Cooper 159; Gentle 32; Rybarczyk 90; Broadhead 31; R. A. Smith 58–59)

Makak has frequently been interpreted as a "new Adam," a "secular adaptation of the theological topos of Christ as the second Adam" (Breslin 103), and an exploration the "New Caribbean Person" popular in

Walcott's body of work (Wilson-Tagoe 36). Most readings of this "new Adam," however, pay little attention to the voltage of the reanimated Pauline, Christological metaphor (consider Romans 5:12-18, Colossians 15:22-45) and, instead, interpret "the new Adam" as a call to Caribbean post-colonials to claim Adam-like powers, name their world, and generate futures from histories of forced migration. Irenaeus's interpretation of the metaphor—"[what] we lost in Adam, i.e. being in God's image and likeness, we have won back in Christ" (Robinson 90)— has steered Christologies courting perichoretic thought, with significant implications regarding how "the new Adam" can be invoked when interpreting Makak and his fellow personae. Unlike the fallen Adam, "the being of Jesus as Christ is a completely open being, a being…that nowhere clings to itself and nowhere stands on its own" (Ratzinger 134; see also Volf 177); therefore, "the new man created in Christ is fundamentally restructured away from a personhood of 'self'-centeredness, 'closedness,' and alienation, towards one of reconciliation, and a new 'openness' of self-giving love to the neighbor" (Turner 228); the faithful are "called *into* a relationship with Christ the new Adam *in* whom they have been reborn" (Robinson 25), bearing the *imago dei* via a paradoxical "coinherence. . .in which the exteriority of relations and interiority of identity in God are one, each Person wholly reflecting and containing the indwelling of the others" (Hart 116).

Makak is a "new Adam" insofar as he shares this persona with his fellow personae through a complex coinherence. In this epilogue, Moustique and Lestrade are "reborn," as evinced in the "new" relationship each shares with Makak and with each other. In their perichoretic communion, to borrow from Moltmann's meditations on perichoretic personhood, "they do not merely exist and live in one another; they also bring one another mutually to manifestation'' (*The Trinity and the Kingdom* 176; see also Delabastita). The personae of the trickster monkey and worthy lion have been transfigured, not abandoned, in a perichoretic communion that risks "self-giving" in "a world of enmity" (Volf 89).[106] For such self-giving risks the terrifying dynamism and complexity of personhood over the easy fixity of a Manichean mask. As Catherine Keller explains,

> The complexity that funds us will not cease to puzzle. For it becomes us. All that forms and
> deforms us comes entangled in its folds. We do not step outside of but embody its open-ended

interpersonality. The person, then, appears—indeed, emerges—as a pneumatic complex. We see

the riddles of its language; we speak the image in the mirror. Or we might collapse back into a

mere mask of ourselves. As persons, irreducibly unique, overly sensitive, we emerge, if we do, at

the edge of a chaos, on the face of a deep, in the word of an enigma. ("Enigmatic Experiences:

Spirit, Complexity and Person" 318)

Dream presents Makak's post-colonial personhood as a perichoretic *activity* of "self-giving and other-

centeredness" (Kruger 15), an "interacting move" (Kaye 236) that must remain vigilantly "spirited"

(Keller, "Enigmatic Experiences: Spirit, Complexity and Person" 309) against succumbing to the paresis

of the self. In his closing lines of the play, Makak reclaims "Makak" as his name, declaring "Makak

lives" on Monkey Mountain *and* in the "dream of his people" (326). Makak, who had identified being

"alone" (236) as a mark of his deprivation, now identifies so deeply with "his people" that he declares

their dreams—those dangerously intimate sites of consciousness—as his dwelling.

Let me conclude, somewhat unconventionally, not by summarizing my argument but by

discussing the value of Basil's enigmatic absence in this epilogue. Lestrade, as noted, refers to him in

passing as "a poor carpenter": a designation rarely associated with the Baron but commonly associated

with the Christ. As his actions and words in this scene demonstrate, Lestrade is no longer the Baron's

zombi. If the previous dream sequences are read as narrative causals, perhaps the Baron was tricked into

facilitating his own decapitation when he failed to recognize subtle-but-crucial typifications vitally

tethering his persona to the triune personae of the player characterized as the moon, the mask, and the

goddess. Because Basil is listed in the *dramatis personae* as "a figure of death," perhaps Basil's absence

signals death's banishment, or "the death of the white colonial world *and* the black world created in

resistance to colonialism" (P. Taylor 214). Frankly, the play offers too few clues to advance a compelling

conclusion about Basil's fate, which is as it should be. *Dream* trades in ambiguity born of multiple,

densely compounded mythological orientations; the play is not a post-colonial riddle to be solved, but a

play that unmasks how multiple mythologies can riddle post-colonial narratives. These multiple

mythologies can give rise to ambiguities and paradoxes that shelter *Dream* from "univocality" in favour

of tricky "plurality, plurivocality, and ambiguity" (Hynes 6) —qualities critical to the post-colonial, perichoretic personhood intoned in the play's epilogue. Basil's ambiguous absence punctuates the play's defiance of a singularly programmatic resolution, providing happy evidence for John Caputo's contention that "[a]mbiguty is not an acid dropped on life's clarity but the veil in which life's *mystery* is kept safe, by which it is protected from the harsh and destructive light of univocity and programmability" (17). Indeed, Caputo argues ambiguity is evidence of life—"things that have a future are ambiguous . . . because they are replete with possibility" (24) —unlike clarity, driving interpretations to be "distilled, stable, settled" (25) in an implicit telos suggesting "no idea is clear until it is dead" (25).

In the last analysis, Basil, the figure of death, keeps the ideas he personified alive through the ambiguity of his absence. Off-stage, veiled from audiences, Basil frustrates efforts to reconcile the play's central characters, frustrates efforts to corral the play's array of symbols into a narrative, and punctures pursuits of hermeneutic smoothness. Basil's fate, in its ambiguity, inoculates perichoretic thought against hegemonizing its poetics lest "we end up seeing ourselves as God's owners, since we have captured God in our conceptual apparatus" (Westphal 272). We are not God's owners any more than we are Makak's. Or one another's. The expositor in me wants to charge Basil with tainting the possibility of interpretation, but that would be an unfair charge: Basil reminds us that the tentativeness of an interpretation, within a post-colonial milieu, signals its vitality. For in this tentativeness, "things have an irreducible richness that cannot be definitively laid out or decisively nailed down, finally straightened out . . . [ambiguity is] alive with possibilities that cannot be neatly ordered or contained" (Caputo 25).

Chapter 4

The God of Small Doubts:

Deixis and Deification in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

1. Introduction

My discussion of Arundhathi Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things*, begins by considering the post-colonial purchase of the Christ myth's trickster paradoxes, as those paradoxes unfold in a post-colonial setting differing—in two key ways—from those encountered in King's *Green Grass Running Water* and Walcott's "Dream on Monkey Mountain." Unlike the "New World" settler colonialism of King's novel or plantation colonialism of Walcott's play, *The God of Small Things* explores Christian mythology as it was purposed for Britain's eastward, "Orientalist," imperial aspirations. Furthermore, Roy's novel highlights the paradoxes of Christianizing colonialism as weathered by peoples—India's Mar Thoma or Thomasine Christians—who have been practicing Christianity for as long as their colonizers. Whereas King's and Walcott's literary Christology reworks (if not rehabilitates) a trickster figure of colonial origin, Roy's text wrestles with constructing a post-colonial trickster Christ of more ambiguous provenance. In short: whereas my earlier chapters considered paradoxical Christological titles—stranger and friend, lion and lamb (or monkey)—with recognizable liturgical resonance, this chapter discusses the literary rendering of the Christ myth as it paradoxically joins oppositions posited more vaguely as "big things" and "small things." *The God of Small Things* nurtures Christological paradoxes impoverished by imperial agendas, reminding us that although bigness and smallness frequently characterize the trickster God of the Bible,[107] the expansion of the British Empire was not propagated in the name of a The God of Small Things.[108]

The God of Small Things is principally set in the village of Ayemenem in Kerala, India. Recounting the saga of three generations of the Ipe family—monied, upper-caste Christians—the novel explores the lasting, damaging impact of internalizing colonial values even as peoples move into post-colonial eras. To demonstrate the complexity of this parasitic colonial inheritance, Roy's novel zigzags

between three timelines rather than unfolding its plot chronologically. The narrative present in the novel is the 1990s, but the volume of action in this timeline—similar to action set in a timeline decades before India's Independence in 1947—is far surpassed by the volume of action concentrated in the novel's 1960s timeline. On the one hand, the potential confusion invited by this asynchronous plot development seems offset by a shared economy of symbols, imagery, foreshadowing and flashbacks. On the other hand, Roy's invocations of these devices can be strikingly paradoxical: for example, images presented as a flashback in a chronologically *earlier* timeline can resurface later as foreshadowing in a chronologically *later* timeline. These paradoxes attend the novel as it opens with the return to Ayemenem of Rahel, the youngest generation of Ipe family and fraternal twin to Estha, who has also recently returned to Ayemenem after many years. Their father, long-estranged from Rahel, has moved to Australia, their uncle Chacko has moved to Canada, their mother is dead, as are their grandparents. Rahel and Estha represent the culmination of colonially-complicated familial dysfunction running across generations: festering within their embittered grandfather, Pappachi, then violently exacerbated when, during the childhood of Rahel and Estha, an affair between their mother, Ammu, and a low-caste Christian carpenter, Velutha, is exposed. Because the Ipe family (like Roy) comes from a lineage of Indian Christians who long predate European Christian colonialism, Christian symbolism in Roy's novel can simultaneously and paradoxically evoke Christian imagery associated with the faith of the colonizers and the colonized. Depending on historical vantage, Velutha could be read as a failed Christ figure who saves no one. Or his transformative soteriological tricks may lace themselves through the novel in ways that may not be immediately recognizable, as I contend. The plot of *The God of Small Things* offers no distinct resolution, concluding with a scene set in the 1960s timeline, teeming with staple images drawn from across the novel, evoking hope that the paradoxical ambiguations of identity—once an anathema to Indian Christians like the Ipes—can reveal a path to post-colonial wellness.

 The God of Small Things chiefly focuses on a particular species of colonial tricksters—native middlemen—and their post-colonial descendants. These characters are haunted by identities ginned in anxiety-ridden affiliations, identities stunted in imaginations too shallow, too thorn-laden, and too easily

vultured to transfigure withering colonial hypocrisies into fruitful post-colonial paradoxes. Although India's liminal middlemen share a cousin-like kinship with figures recognizable in other colonized geographies—including King's Eli Stands Alone, the University of Toronto Shakespeare Professor, and Walcott's Corporal Lestrade, the mulatto prefect—the prominence of these middlemen in India's colonial history is more markedly pronounced. "The British Empire [in India] would not have lasted a week," noted Salman Rushdie, "without such collaborators among its colonized people" (8). As colonial administrators, these middlemen were commissioned to classify India's social polity, relying on colonial models of taxonomy enforceable, ultimately, by violence. Big things in one column, small things in another—or else.

As tricksters, ironically tasked with contriving categorical borders of identity that failed to contain *their* liminality, these middlemen were haunted with anxieties regarding ambiguation and the precarity it invited. Because imperial Christianizing in India, perhaps surprisingly, risked exacerbating ambiguations of identity that colonial governance attempted to regiment, Christian allusions in *The God of Small Things* evoke nervous indeterminacy, the specter of colonial precarity still haunting post-colonial descendants of these middlemen. Curiously, as my discussion will explore, the novel's most explicit trickster Christ figure, Velutha, does *not* descend from colonial middlemen. Indeed, as a catalyzer of ambiguation, Velutha is executed by the descendants of trickster middlemen attempting to excise the anxiety of their indeterminacy. Velutha's salvific resurrection, following the trickster logic of the novel, is neither explicit nor distinct. Velutha's resurrection, much like the unfolding of Velutha's character, is intoned in the novel's tricky ambiguations: rather than presenting readers with evidence that could be marshaled to advance a confident apology for Velutha's resurrection, *The God of Small Things* sews doubts as tiny as mustard seeds regarding the finality of Velutha's death. Within the bleak, "Gothic post-colonial" (Rofail 203) milieu of Roy's novel, "faith" does not connote a mountain-moving confession of belief: "faith," paradoxically, connotes *doubting* the grim, assumed "certainties" of post-colonial privations. Velutha, the trickster Christ, answers his executioners' fears of ambiguation by casting ambiguity on the certainty of his death itself.

The second section of this chapter continues to outline the novel's apology for the purchase of indeterminacy in post-colonial India by considering the linguistic mechanism and narrative dynamic—deixis and diegesis—through which ambiguations of identity are seeded, seeking fruition in a soteriology of theosis. Theosis, within Christian traditions, imagines salvation as deification, as becoming increasingly Christ-like and, therefore, enjoying an increasingly hypostatic personhood capable of ever-deepening, paradoxical identifications. This section proceeds to present the unseen, unnamed, "omniscient" third person narrator's persona in *The God of Small Things* as the tricky literary "site" in which the paradoxes of theosis are intoned. Typically, because such narrators evade being identified by name or gaze, they are more amorphously delimited than the personae of characters and, therefore, often and understandably skirt attention as literary personae. *The God of Small Things*, however, leverages this ambiguity to intimate the narrator's emergent, hypostatic persona and trace its transfiguration across the novel. Witnessing this transfiguration invites readers to see differences—such as those between things big and things small—differently.

The third section of this chapter relies more heavily on literary exposition to illustrate the post-colonial, Christologically-inflected implications of seeing differences differently. This section begins by exploring how the novel's first chapter tests our assumptions about conventions attending the novelization of narrative perspectives and personae. It discusses the way the theosis of the narrator's persona challenges (or allows?) us to revisit our presumptions about bigness and smallness and, in so doing, invites us to see, differently, the differences between two contrastingly positioned characters: Velutha the Christ figure, and Pappachi the colonial middleman extraordinaire. My discussion of Velutha here compares how two leitmotifs—"skyblue" and "blue church sky"—transfigure connotations of bigness and smallness in order to clear our vision, to purpose uncertainty as a catalyst allowing us to see difference differently. Next, my discussion of Pappachi explores how the narrator's theosis engages Pappachi's colonial obsession for naming, paradoxically transfiguring connotations of bigness and smallness, and doing so in a manner that renders ambiguous the finality of Velutha's execution.

2. Expository Strategies Engaging Paradoxes of the Christ's Human and Divine Horizons of

Consciousness

2.1 The Tricksters in Question

King's and Walcott's tricksters may have subscribed to questionable ethics, but these tricksters were nonetheless often positioned sympathetically as underdogs. Most of Roy's tricksters elicit still murkier affections, having descended from the small fraction of Indians who, politically and materially, profited from or avoided or were more likely to survive major privations inflicted by, and intrinsic to, the British colonization of India: calculated famines (Howitt 269–72; Liggins 83), conscious impoverishment, capricious deracination and studied exacerbations of communal violence. Serving as the "steel frame of British rule in India" (Mullaney 15, 33) as advocated by Lord Macaulay in his infamous 1835 "Minute on Indian Education," these indigenous colonial administrators would be "Indian in blood and colour, but English in opinions, in morals and intellect," groomed as "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern" (Macaulay). For those Indian in colour administrators, becoming English in intellect would involve concurring with Macaulay's infamous assertion in that same Minute that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay). Elementary trickster logic entangled the cultural engineering of these "brown Englishmen." They were curiously neither quite British nor Indian, and they were commissioned to institute distinctions between colonizers and colonized—distinctions that they were then impossibly tasked to traverse precariously. They were eerily assigned a role akin to Hermes, navigating "colonial encounters at the crossroads of mutual interpretation resemble the shape-shifting acts of the Greek messenger god" (Grau, "Divine Commerce: A Post-colonial Christology for Times of Neocolonial Empire" 82). Hermes, the "gadfly" (Crapanzano 44) envoy who inspired the term "hermeneutics," the trickster messenger unsettlingly "involved in translation and transitions" (Grau, *Refiguring Theological Hermeneutics* vii) that "toppled the worlds of many" (Crapanzano 44)—and, therefore, the unheralded, delusive muse of "Macaulayists," Macaulay's class of creolized, deputized tricksters and their descendants. Macaulay's brown Englishmen were border-crossers, ironically tasked with obsessively classifying Indians "in ever-more bewilderingly narrow

terms" (Tharoor 289–90), fossilizing, fracturing and even unintentionally fabricating communal identities that conformed to classificatory rituals of colonial administration (Assayag 334). Classificatory rituals, that is, in which Macaulayist tricksters were "a ritual figure outside the ritual" (Maravić), colonial agents pursuing "totalizing comprehension…obliged to *exclude* or *repress* that which lay outside it" (Stam 299).

Of course, just because one can create a tier of trickster prefects does not mean one can tame or trust it—let alone *cheat* it for long. Lord Lytton, viceroy in 1878, summarized a decades-standing practice regarding Indians "entitled to expect and claim appointment to the highest posts in that service":

> We all know that these claims and expectations *never can or will be fulfilled*. We have had to choose between prohibiting them and cheating them, and we have chosen the least straight-forward course (*The Parliamentary Debates, Authorized Edition* 63, emphasis in original; see also Tharoor 103).

This convention of colonial governance would prove disastrous, paradoxically tasking ambiguated trickster hermeneuts to mediate colonial governance increasingly premised on racist disambiguation, to erect stiff distinctions increasingly impracticable for them to straddle. And so from this trickster class of "brown Englishmen" emerged the posterboys of India's independence movement (including key leaders such as Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah), followed by a slate of prominent post-colonial scholars, novelists, businesspeople,[109] and the majority of India's domestically influential post-Independence diaspora.

One might suspect Roy's post-colonial Christ would also emerge from this detachment of paradox-sodden brown English tricksters, but not so. In *The God of Small Things,* it is the Macaulayist lineage, as represented by three generations of the Ipe family, that is in need of soteriological rescue. Despite the seemingly redemptive fruits produced by Macaulayists and their offspring, Roy's novel foregroundss convolutions of identity that can beset the post-colonial descendants of Macaulay's trickster hermeneuts, convolutions still constricting the range of possibilities through which post-colonial liberations can be imagined and pursued. "Indians," observes comedian Vir Das, "are the white people of brown people" (Venugopal). *Toronto Star* columnist, Shree Paradkar, illustrates the tenacity of these inherited convolutions in her sharply titled column, "I was white until I came to Canada" (Paradkar).

Paradkar notes that as one born "in post-colonial India, of "middle-class, upper caste" heritage, she only realized after moving to Canada how her activism in India made her a brown version of "a well-meaning white feminist" (Paradkar). Paradkar astutely recognizes a connection between the myopia compromising her Indian activism and her initial inability to "see the difference between the mostly white Canadians around me and myself—I thought I was essentially like them, with darker skin and a few religious rituals" (Paradkar). Racism predictably disabused Paradkar of such delusions, challenging her to recognize the colonial atavism of her post-colonial identifications: "if I was once white, by attitude, I was once native, too, in fact" (Paradkar). That realizing this paradox—phrased as an inversion of Macaulay's "Indian in blood…English in taste"—took Paradkar decades and global migration is no slight against her. Rather, the scope of her efforts helps illustrate how the doctored identities of colonial agents—those paradoxically liminal stewards of fixity—can still vex the post-colonial agency of their descendants. The convolutions of consciousness to which Paradkar confesses affect Roy's characters as well, albeit with much more macabre consequences, bespeaking the incendiary potential of anxieties tempered into the histories of liminal subjects propagating colonial fictions of fixity.

In Roy's novel, the correlation between colonialism and categorization is emphatically characterized by Pappachi, an Imperial Entomologist (a big title for someone who categorizes small things) whose career spanned the later decades of the British Raj and early days of post-colonial India. "Pappachi was a *chi-chi poach*," (50) comments Ammu, Pappachi's daughter, to her brother, Chacko. Inheriting his father's desire to categorize, Chacko corrects, "Anglophile" (50). Indeed, Chacko implicates Baby Kochamma (his aunt), Ammu, her children and himself for all being helpless Anglophiles. The novel comfortably validates Chacko's observation. Chacko was briefly married to Margaret Kochamma, a white woman whom he still parades long after their divorce, during her visit to India (135). Baby Kochamma falls in love with an Irish Roman Catholic missionary priest (23), converts to Roman Catholicism hoping to convince him to renounce his vows (that is, to convert *him*) but, alas, the missionary eventually converts to Hinduism (281). When Margaret Kochamma, on her first trip to India, asks an awkward cultural question about Kochu Maria, the Ipe family's lower-high caste help who is not

of Macaulayist lineage, Ammu responds even more awkwardly with, "Must we behave like some godforsaken tribe that's just been discovered?" (171) Ammu's reaction could be read as a sarcastic censure directed at Margaret Kochamma, but given Ammu's Macaulayist upbringing, it's just as likely her reaction bespeaks an ugly strain of Indian anti-colonialism that, simply put, argued India was getting a raw deal because Indians were being treated like Africans—or, as Gandhi put it, "dragged down to the position of a raw Kaffir" (Mahatma Gandhi 410). Ammu's children, Estha and Rahel, are riddled with worries that their English cousin, Sophie Mol, by virtue of her whiteness alone is a more desirable child than they are (101). As Chacko notes, they are "trapped outside their own history" (51) like people on the outside of a house looking in.

Consider: even as imperial rhetoric championed British identity as an ideal towards which humanity should aspire, campaigns to classify and cordon conquered subjects evinced "British horror of diluting their own, idealized English identity, to which their colonial subjects were not *allowed* to aspire" (Tharoor 132, emphasis mine; see also Wiener 137, 248). The consequences of this incongruity, observes Ranjana Khanna, "may leave one with the experience of worrying strangeness (an uncanny ambiguity), which is both recognition of oneself and its lack. It is the experience of oneself *as other*" (182). As Khanna details, colonial social classifications not only evince the influence of Darwin's biological theories; they appeared to corroborate Freud's identification of "taboo" with the ambiguous collocation of the "the sacred and the unclean" (Khanna 79, see also 89, 110; see also Jenks 45–46)—in our case, the colonizer and the colonized, big things and small things—interpolated through Roy's characters' experiences of otherness as "worrying strangeness" or "uncanny ambiguity." Deborah Lupton marshals popular post-colonial theorizations of such liminality, contending that because this liminality threatens undermining the governing logic of regimes structured on binarized Otherness, "ambivalence" can rouse "feelings of unease and repulsion" (45) over "that which is seen to be anomalous, difficult to classify" (135).

At the same time, Herbrechter, acknowledging liminality as an attribute of a "trickster figure" that enables "'passing' from one perspective or identity to the other," nevertheless cautions,

the liminal is also always in danger of being appropriated by "Others" *and* of appropriating others

himself [sic]. Liminality is the precondition of a psychotic form of appropriation, which always

incorporates the other, because the only Other is located within one's own liminality. (276)

The liminal trickster risks having its subjectivity endlessly refracted like reflections forever ricocheting

between facing mirrors, mimicry maddeningly mimicking mimicry until identity seeks its constitution in

what it can appropriate, not in what it can identify with or recognize. In *The God of Small Things*, the

horror courted by such risk, and the accompanying horrors committed to mitigate such risk, hound

generations. The novel's relatively privileged, high-caste post-colonial trickster descendants of

Macaulayists inherit their forbearers "worrying strangeness," equating excising "the experience of oneself

as other" with excising taboo ambiguations affecting their identifications. The result? Resorting to cruel

tactics of colonial trickery, attempting to arrest fatally the ascension of Roy's low-caste, post-colonial

Christ figure, Velutha. For these high-caste characters, anxieties attending obscured self-recognition, as if

looking in a mirror darkly, are overshadowed by fears of looking in the mirror and recognizing Velutha's

dark-skinned otherness, or the horror of their smallness.

Velutha is neither an uncontentious Christ figure nor an obvious trickster figure, which makes

him an excellent candidate to be either, and especially to be both. Velutha is the "Fifth Business" of the

story: technically presented as a minor character—insofar as he only appears a few times in the novel and

hardly speaks—who nevertheless critically shapes narrative outcomes. Velutha is a Christian, a talented

carpenter and machinist of low-caste Paravan origins who, after being betrayed by Rahel and Estha, the

high-caste Christian children he loved, is framed for murdering Sophie Mol, these children's visiting

English cousin. In police custody, accused of violating a white child, Velutha is beaten to death. But as

characters party to his fatal brutalization know, Velutha's death has nothing to do with breaking legal

codes and everything to do with violating social codes. Velutha's affair with Rahel's and Estha's mother,

Ammu, foments high-caste anxieties about shaming, anxieties screaming for secrecy, anxieties straining

to displace the *sharam* of caste-transgression by fronting a story—about a dark-skinned man violating a

white girl—that stoke sympathies stamped in colonial stereotypes.

As my chapter will move on to detail, colonizing Christianity represented menacing ambiguity within a colonial regime heavily premised on enforceable classification, and Velutha embodies the lasting anxieties of such ambiguity in a post-colonial milieu. Velutha's persona represents the anxieties underwriting Macaulayist constructions of personhood, the anxieties animating the metonymies through which these characters seek disambiguation and legitimatization. But Velutha also represents, among so many things, the post-colonial potency of such ambiguation. Velutha, whose identity under colonial regimes was uncertifiable, champions uncertainty as a catalyst allowing us to see difference differently. His resurrection is intoned in the novel by a literary evocation of theosis, a long-standing Orthodox doctrine of sanctification in which distinctions between Christ and a Christian are subject to a transfiguration enabling a similarly paradoxical concomitance of identity witnessed between Christ and his Trinitarian counterparts. The trickiness of Velutha's theosis resides in the sneaky arena of its articulation: not in the chronologically traceable transfiguration of a character, but in the transfiguration of the novel's anonymous, omniscient, third-person narrator's consciousness.

Before we can return to exploring key causes and consequences of Velutha's Christological outmaneuvering of the novel's murderous tricksters, we should consider why Roy's invocations of Christian allusions can evoke ambiguity and paradox alongside, if not over, sore associations with European imperialism. Roy's Christian allusions requisition the dizzying history of British Christianizing in India, a history perplexed by the cross-purposes of colonizers bearing a Cross and the ensuing confusions of Indians who had or would identify as Christians. Because these allusions are Christologically compounded in—but not confined to—Velutha's characterization, canvasing the provenance of their ambiguity should also help us approach Velutha as a paradoxical trickster, one teasing us with glimpses of small things in hypostatic union with big things.

2.2 Ambiguities and Ambiguations of British Christian Imperialism

Imperial integration of Christianizing agendas varied in design and consequence across British colonies, each ridden with stinging contradictions and numbing complexities. These stinging, numbing

generators of ambiguity, however, have enjoyed more prominent associations with Christian imperialism in India than with other colonies. Considering the commitment of the colonial pogrom in India to clarifying and stratifying identifications, such associations would prove troublesome. Variations of Robert Eric Frykenberg's contention—"rarely was the relationship between Christian missions and Empire so complex as in India" ("Christian Missions and The Raj" 107)—are widespread and well tenured. "The question recurs," notes W.M. Clarkson in his extended 1851 missionary tract, "India is ours, —what are we to do with it?" (Clarkson xiii) Reasons for the recurrence of the such questions preoccupy *Our Empire's Debt to Missions,* a century-old apologia by then Moderator of the Church of Scotland's General Assembly, J.N. Ogilvie: confronting disjunctions marking Anglo/British policies towards Christianizing India, Ogilvie appeals to racism for clarity, arguing that the complexity and complications riddling these policies demonstrate why missionizing efforts targeted at "the civilizations of the East" often bore little semblance with efforts targeted at the "Child-Races of the Empire" (Ogilvie 59). Nearly a century later, the continuing association of British Christianizing with ambiguity foregroundss Gerald Studdert-Kennedy's counterintuitive (but not unconvincing) argument that in India the "Christian imperialism of the British derived much of its energy *from* its internal conflicts and contradictions" (31, emphasis mine).

We need not accept the conclusions of either Ogilvie or Studdert-Kennedy to identify the telling premise their arguments share: whether British efforts to Christianize India needed to be defended from, or commended for, their association with being mottled/heterogeneous, both arguments showcase the tenure of this association. It is easier to appreciate why Roy's post-colonial invocation of Christian poetics can signal ambiguity, rather than signaling a straightforward affiliation with British hegemony, considering such affiliations were either actively resisted by entrenched British imperial interests or muddied by shifting, competing imperial agendas entangled in internecine, metropolitan theological antagonisms. While King and Walcott wrestle with the colonial provenance of imposed Christian mythology across the Americas and the Caribbean, Roy's novel confronts the consequences of tensions

bedeviling a variant strain of colonizing religion from that purposed for Britain's conquest of the "New World."

British Imperialism in India was the initiative of the British East India Company, whose engagements with Christianization typify ironies that would riddle later British attempts to mix religion into eastward imperial ambitions. Chartered in 1600, the Company's commission conspicuously omitted references to religion that characterized similar charters for American-bound ventures (Ogilvie 11). Despite resisting adopting comparable "pious clauses" for over two centuries, the Company seeded one of the largest surviving communities of indigenized, self-sustaining, English-speaking Indian Christians— Anglo-Indians, or "Eurasians"—by encouraging Company soldiers to take local wives and/or mistresses. By 1891, imperial administrators recognized Anglo-Indians as a distinct "ethnic" community, and while one might assume Anglo-Indians would neatly fit Macaulay's vision of "brown Englishmen," this community of "half-castes" stirred misgivings within increasingly racialized, nineteenth century imperial ideologies intent on more strictly superintending distinctions between colonizers and colonized (Buettner 82; Strong 130,141).

The Company, while comfortable fathering Indian Christians, emphatically disassociated itself from missionizing agendas (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 109; Liggins 81; Strong 153), blamed missionaries for unwittingly inciting the Vellore Mutiny of 1806 (Cutmore 80; Strong 124), and banned missionaries passage on Company vessels until 1813 (Riddick 146). That the company was compelled, in part, to lift their ban by the lobbying efforts of abolitionist William Wilberforce (Liggins 80) bespeaks an increasingly complex set of motivations attending British Christianizing in India. Before 1813, British missionaries in India skirted Company censure by seeking travel and refuge with *competing* Dutch colonizers (Riddick 147). By the early nineteenth century, the Company's policy of Christianization via procreation would be stunted by miscegenation laws and supplanted by missionaries—the majority of whom in British India were women (Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* 18; see also Kent 85, 89; Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire" 245; D. Arnold 87). I find it illustrative by the mid-nineteenth

century, Calcutta had been increasingly segregated into the mostly-British White Town and mostly-Indian Black Town, sharply contrasting the mores of the seventeenth century Company officer credited in colonial lore for founding the city: Job Charnock, who married a Hindu.

That the Company's anti-missionary stance continued to enjoy significant currency well into the nineteenth century is surprising, considering the quick rise of nineteenth century low-church and high-church missionizing (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 117) that followed Edmund Burke's late eighteenth century, seven-year Parliamentary efforts to impeach the Company's director, Warren Hastings, for abuses exposing "no Christian piety in the man" (Burke 60).[110] Even Macaulay had no interest in Christianizing his "brown Englishmen," contending such attempts would complicate colonial incursion. "Assuredly," wrote Macaulay in his Minute, "it is the duty of the British Government in India to be not only tolerant but neutral on all religious questions," insisting, "We abstain, and I shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting the natives to Christianity" (Macaulay). A mere three years later, Macaulay's position would even be echoed by William Howitt's criticism of imperial expansion on Christian grounds: "If the real object of our policy and exertions in India has been the achievement of wealth and power, as it undoubtedly has, it is pitiful and hypocritical to endeavor to clothe it with the pretence of working the will of Providence" (207). By 1857, pro-missionizing imperialists in prominent pulpits would echo the Dean of St. Paul's declaration that India's First War of Independence was divine judgment visited on imperial "neglect in spreading Christianity among the idolatrous and infidel populations of India" ("The National Fast Day" 370; see also Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire* 70–72, 74, 76; Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire" 237). But even then, charges circulated that "proselytizing zeal" had sparked the uprising (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 112; Biagini 107; Riddick 152). Queen Victoria continued to affirm that though "acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any of our subjects," (in Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700* 10), and uneven changes to ensuing imperial support of divergent mission initiatives meant critiques of missionary initiatives once lobbed by Company officers

were now being lobbed *between* missionaries (Riddick 152–55; Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 112; Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818-1940* 17, 48; Briggs 10).

Inspired by aspects of William Carey's late nineteenth century evangelical plea, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, low-church missionizing frequently found itself at odds with more "academic" models of later high-church missions inclined towards Thomas Arnold's, mid-eighteenth century "theological shift, from a doctrinally preoccupied and strongly evangelical Christianity to a religious commitment that could express itself in active and practical terms" (Studdert-Kennedy 28; see also Strong 136; Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 127; Liggins 89–90; K. Ward, *A History of Global Anglicanism.* 208).[111] "Teach these Hindu youths…Newtonian philosophy" went the argument, ignoring Newton's own theological heterodoxy, and "the astronomic science of Hinduism fails" (Clarkson xv; see also Liggins 89).[112] Early nineteenth century evangelical missionaries, "branded as fanatics and satirized as fools" (Liggins 91) for believing India could be Christianized as the "New World" had been, would by the late nineteenth be satirized as religiously naïve cultural chauvinists even by Rudyard Kipling (in his short story, "Lispeth"). The model of colonial Christianization taken to task in *The God of Small Things* bears less semblance to evangelical missionizing in India—signaled partly by the novel's dismissive, Kipling-like caricature of post-colonial missionaries (57, 281, 290)—than to an ascendant, mid-nineteenth century vision of British Christian imperialism, one less invested in the salvation of individual souls than a "synthesis between history and faith" (Studdert-Kennedy 25). Such synthesis, first notably attempted in 1865 by John Robert Seeley (in a British imperial context at least) presented an exegesis of Matthew 6:33 ("Seek first the kingdom of God" ESV) as a founding premise: "Christ placed the happiness of man in a political constitution" (Seeley 132). As India's independence movements gained steam during the early twentieth century, and British Christianizers variously supported or opposed the political constitution of India's sovereignty, these contesting visions of India's Christianization would further accentuate associations of British

Christianization with multiplicity, discordance and equivocation. Tellingly, the "pro-independence" India Act of 1935 would be tabled in Parliament by the Archbishop of Canterbury despite its vocal opposition from "the Christian imperialism of the die-hard defenders of the Raj," as Studdert-Kennedy puts it (190). Given the British Raj's inclination for administrative codification, variations and vacillations typifying imperial Christianization helped foment a political and religious morass precarious for any Indian to navigate. The particular ways in which this precarity was pronounced for India's Christians is an issue to which we now turn.

2.3 The Christians of India

For India's Christians, British imperialism stoked political, religious and cultural "ambiguity and ambivalence" (Frykenberg, "Introduction: Dealing with Contested Definitions and Controversial Perspectives" 2; see also Oddie 178) that demanded weathering costly and often caustic realignments of identity. The Company routinely harassed and fired its Christian converts (Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858* 169). One Bishop's contentious support of caste segregation in Indian churches would immediately be followed by another's violent anathemization of such practices (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 119–20). The Company's short-lived favouritism towards Thomasine Christians would be concurrent with years of neglecting the appeals of Tamil Christians' for protection from persecution (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 119–20). Later attempts to "support" India's Christians would be mired in acrid disputes over parish ownership, ecclesiastical succession, liturgy and caste segregation (Carson, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation?" 144; Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 118–19, 121).[113]

Evidence of trade and pre-Christian Jewish communities in Kerala suggest Thomasine Christians' traditional beliefs that their communities were seeded in 52 C.E. by the missionizing efforts of Thomas, one of the original twelve Disciple, *could* be possible. More compelling evidence exists, however, for the growth of the community in 345 C.E. after the arrival of Syrian Christians under the leadership of

Thomas of Kana (Malekandathil 261). These Christians subscribed to a so-called "Nestorian" Christology, declared heretical by the Councils of Ephesus (431 C.E.) and Chalcedon (451 C.E.), making its contemporary "orthodoxization" (Barr 105) all the more storied. Separated from the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Christianity by geography, the growth of Islam, their stigmatization as "Nestorians," and the many schisms in the governance of their denomination, Thomasine Christians had been left to develop liturgies and theologies with little accountability to their Metropolitan. The energy invested over a millennium by Thomasine Christians to weave themselves into the cultural and religious fabric of their home was nearly bankrupted by the arrival of European imperialists. Portuguese misrule culminated in the Synod of Udyamperoor (Diamper) in 1599, which commissioned burning Thomasine libraries and killing Thomasine priests who resisted Latinization. The Dutch interregnum, from the mid-seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century, provided reprieve from aggressive Latinization while in the main remaining disengaged from Thomasine Christians' fractious denominationalism and their turbulent relationships with Roman Catholic and Orthodox Sees (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 122).

By the time British Christianizers arrived, Thomasine Christians were fractured into congregations that might be as explicitly Roman Catholic in name as they were Orthodox in rite, or vice-a-versa, paired with congregations whose professed religious affiliation—typically to the Sees of Jerusalem, Antioch, or Rome—and uncertain on-the-ground practice befuddled subjecting Thomasine Christians to easy denominational taxonomies. Eschewing the violence of previous Christian imperialists did not dissuade British Christianizers from aggravating Thomasine Christian's schisms. Privileges extended to some Thomasine Christians by Colonel John Munro, the Company's Resident (that is, local governor) in Travancore 1810-1819—including favouritism in courts, tax concessions, and access to missionary schools funded by "generous gifts of money, land, and building materials" wrestled from a local *rani* (Carson, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation?" 144)—were short-lived, but the resentment and suspicion triggered by this favoritism typified how British influence would continue to addle "the delicately balanced equilibrium between

Syrian Christians and the Hindu community that had been so carefully built up and nurtured over

centuries" (Carson, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or

Confrontation?" 150; see also Dempsey 67). Missionaries intent on conflating "the Empire of Britain and

the Empire of Christ" (Ogilvie 3) found themselves talking in circles—hermeneutic circles, if you will—

when trying to stamp out Keralite Christian devotional cults to St. George (Dempsey 43).[114]

        That British Protestantism, itself denominationally disjointed, further fractured the schism-ridden

Thomasine Christians is not nearly as surprising as *where* the fault-lines of these fractures surfaced. The

St. Thomas Marthomite Church, for example, was an Anglican movement whose name misleadingly

invoked Mar Thoma I, the first Indian-selected Metropolitan Bishop of the Malankara Church whose

decedents formed the Mar Thoma Syrian Church to resist imperialist Latinization. Mar Thoma Syrian

Christians, however, sensing a greater demographic threat from kin Christian communities shaped by

centuries of Latinization than from upstart British Protestants, petitioned Anglican missionaries for

economic aid to guard their "churches from the Roman Catholics" (Dempsey 43), falsely promising to

join the Anglican communion after "monetary and political benefits from the British" were secured, but

appreciative enough to adopt vernacular languages into an otherwise Orthodox liturgy (K. Ward, *A*

History of Global Anglicanism. 222).

        Today, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church officially identifies itself as, "Apostolic in

origin, Universal in nature, Biblical in faith, Evangelical in outlook, Oriental in worship, Democratic in

function, and Episcopal in character" (*Introduction - Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church*). The resort

to evasiveness aside—"Universal" means "Roman Catholic," for they are a church now in full

communion with Rome—the Malankara Church's decision to market itself by highlighting its inability to

be characterized by conventional Christian designations evinces an association of Thomasine Christianity

with ambiguations. Indeed, even Thomasines pursuing clarity born of attempted distinction have

counterproductively seeded an array of amorphously named[115] congregations, including the following

sample: the Chaldean Syrian Church, which despite its name is not Roman Catholic and follows an East

Syrian rite under the office of the Assyrian Church of the East; the Syro-Malabar Roman Catholic Church which also follows the East Syrian Rite; the Syro-Malankara Roman Catholic Church which follows the West Syrian Rite; the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church which also follows the West Syrian Rite and appoints its own Catholicoi; the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church which identifies with Oriental Orthodoxy but remains as independent from its Syriac Orthodox Patriarch as the Malankara Syrian Church remains from Rome; the Malabar Independent Syrian Church which identifies itself as Oriental Orthodox; and the St Thomas Evangelical Church, a Reformation-inspired movement. Confused yet? Because I could go on. But I think you get the point: in a Keralite context, post-colonial allusions to Christian traditions can for good reason include evocations of trenchant ambiguity paradoxically incited by a drive to classify and distinguish—in contrast to evoking *only* a double-barreled Manichean binary fixing colonizing Christians against colonized heathens.[116]

I suspect ambiguities attending British Christianization of India help explain why the dearth of historicized studies—"Christian missions and missionary history have never generated as much attention for India as for Africa, or even China" (Frykenberg, "India to 1858" 207)—are paradoxically complimented by the rich tradition of literary witness to "a range of ambiguous accommodations" born of encounters "between Christianity and religions of the east…in which Bacon, Shakespeare, Milton, Addison, Browning, Tennyson and many others had a part to play" (Studdert-Kennedy 60). Roy's post-colonial novel answers its complicated lineage to these "ambiguous accommodations" by crafting a narrativized, Christologically-inflected case for accommodating ambiguities. And it's a challenging case to make, for even as imperialism exacerbated certain ambiguations of Indian Christians' place within the governing regime, these lasting ambiguities menace post-colonial pursuits of identification still bridled to a colonial "passion for codification, both Brahmanical and British…to solidify institutions in ways never known before" (Carson, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Hinduism in Kerala: Integration, Adaptation, or Confrontation?" 154). For Kerala's Christian "brown Englishmen," sharing the same religion as their colonizers amplified ambiguities about the allegiances of these trickster hermeneuts. Roy's post-colonial characters conspicuously embody identities too fluid and too intersectional to be institutionally solidified;

and since post-colonial governance remains thickly mired in thinly reformed institutions of colonial administration the engagements with governance of Roy's characters often demand the performance of curated identities, juggling context-contingent understatements and exaggerations. Sometimes, these engagements lead a character to resort to self-mutilation as they contort themselves into assigned codifications, as Velutha's father does when plucking out his glass eye (241); on other occasions, the governance of regimenting identification sanctions assassination and perjury, ostracization and penury. *The God of Small Things* could be interpreted as a cautionary tale, dissuading readers by graphically detailing the consequences of challenging ingrained codifications, but such readings likely miss the Christological tricks slinking through the novel's narrativized theosis, trafficking a gospel of antinomy and ambiguity.

2.5 Narrative Planes, Diegesis and Theosis

Roy's novel advances its multiple narratives using multiple story-telling strategies. My analysis focuses on two of these narratives and strategies. First, Roy's novel contains a chronological narrative conveyed in dyssynchronous fragments. The "narrative present" in Roy's novel quietly ebbs through three days set in the early 1990s, its movement swollen by flashfloods of foreshadowing flashbacks from the novel's major narrative tributaries, chiefly set in the late 1960s. *The God of Small Things* chronically drifts between these narrative chronologies—sometimes within a single paragraph, commonly within clusters of pages, culminating in a novel that, in Roy's words, "begins in the end; ends in the middle" (Naughtie, "*Interview With Arundhati Roy*"

). Second, Roy's novel—across its shifting narrative timelines—steadily develops shared sets of tropes and motifs that evoke a paradoxical counter-narrative as they accrue currency within the novel's "divine economy of salvation" (Cahill 134). Indeed, in testing hermeneutic assumptions that privilege chronology as a curator of narrative, Roy's novel echoes a tradition of "multi-leveled typology in Biblical interpretation" (Prickett 165) largely abandoned by Western Christianity during the Renaissance, when a more strictly "linear view of time" (Prickett 165) constricted hermeneutics outside its horizon.

Otherwise put, the painful events denoted in the novel's plot unusually contrast the hope connoted in the novel's strategies of emplotment. Literary studies have produced a range of technical terms through which this contrast could be characterized. Drawing on James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz, *The God of Small Things* toys with now "dominant models" of narration that unfold "plot as a sequence of logically connected events" (6), instead embedding experiences paradoxically in both "'story' or '*fabula*' (referring to the chronological order of events) and 'discourse' or '*sjuzhet*' (referring to the order in which those events are presented)" (6). Robyn Warhol's development of Gerald Prince's narratological coinage, "disnarrated" (220) and "unnarrated" (221), helps locate justifications for Velutha's execution within the novel's *fabula* as disnarration ("the narration of something that might have happened or was imagined to happened but did not actually happen" [Phelan and Rabinowitz 7]). This disnarration within the *fabula* of the novel intones Velutha's resurrection within the novel's *sjuzhet* as "unnarratable," or more specifically "supranarratable" due to its ineffability evinced in passages "that explicitly do not tell what is supposed to have happened" (Phelan and Rabinowitz 7). Clarified further using Kristeva's nomenclature, the supranarratable *sjuzhet* in *The God of Small Things* operates within the novel's "'genotext' (the latent productive substrata of intertextual relation then emerging in the manifest 'phenotext')" (West-Pavlov, *Spaces of Fiction / Fictions of Space* 88). These intertextual relations, in Roy's novel, enjoin genotext and phenotext relying on literary tricks that pollute distinctions between "story time" and "discourse time" (West-Pavlov, *Spaces of Fiction / Fictions of Space* 112). The enjoinment of these dynamics emerges within the narrator's "diegesis"—its implicit or explicit consciousness of, engagement with, relation to or control over characters and events.

Roy's enjoinment of these dynamics, however, often conjures paradoxes with Christological tints, such as those emerging from Christian meditations on theosis—to which we now turn. Roy's Christological constructions gravitate towards Orthodox correlations of salvation with theosis. But before we consider Roy's narrativization of theosis, it would be helpful to consider more closely the paradoxical ambiguation and actualization of identity that theosis suggests. Theosis, as a Christologically-centered soteriology, demands imagining the collocation of identities paradoxically positioned within

irreconcilable categories of identification. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, theosis is intimated in early Christians' liturgies and hermeneutics (C. Buck 95; Kärkkäinen 227–29; W. Morris 115), explicated in patristic thought (McGuckin 263; Hunt 81), and explored in generations of still-continuing debates (McGrath 339–40; Kharlamov 1, 3–7, 9–12, 16–18; see also W. Morris 114). Broadly put, theosis signifies deification—becoming God-like in a Trinitarian manner, reconstituting identity hypostatically, participating in a divine union into which one's personhood is not effaced (as with consuming monism) but focalized and "vocated" (in theological terminology)[117] by the transfiguring conflux of identifications it invites.

Whereas thick scholarship surrounds theological efforts by Western Christians to recognize theosis lurking in the teachings of their traditions' heavy hitters (Mansueto 34–35; Kärkkäinen 239; Bakken 50; see also Greggs; Christensen, "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine"), the centrality of theosis in Eastern Christianity is axiomatic. For Eastern Christians, the logic of theosis has been liberally enmeshed with the logic of incarnation, Christology, Trinitarianism, the demands of soteriology, and the ends of eschatology (Bingaman 5, 43; Gorman 45; J. Lee 20). Even Augustine's postulations on "original sin," which have long preoccupied Western soteriologies, made only modest inroads into Eastern Christian thinking steeped in the Cappadocian Fathers' doctrinal poetics of theosis (Prosic 207; S. Thomas 184,186; Woodhead 79; C. Buck 131). Whereas Western soteriologies have tended to liken atonement to appeasement, requiring Christ to suffer a "forensic," (Kharlamov 10, 19, 206) "penal substitution" (Meister 131) for our sinfulness, Eastern soteriologies have tended to liken atonement to a Christological, incarnational transfiguration in which one's divinization demands simultaneously deepening one's *humanization* (Gorman 37; Zizioulas 50; J. Lee 20; Chronic 182; Eddy and Beiby 90; W. Morris 111, 116; Bakken 85). The dynamics and manifestations of such tricky transfigurations have been imagined in ethical, ontological and even mystically physical terms, where a disciple begins to *look* like Jesus of Nazareth, as his disciple Thomas was purported to have done.

For our purposes, the doctrine of theosis is critical for two reasons. First, theosis muddles a clean Manichean logic of differentiation and courts ambiguations by relying on paradoxical, Trinitarian poetics

of hypostatic identification that "blur" commonly posited distinctions between subject and objects

(Geffert and Stavrou 131; see also Christensen, "The Promise, Process, and Problem of Theosis" 27) and

can "potentially redefine the boundaries between "self" and "others" (Charlton 129). Because "the

concept of theosis implies that divine-human boundaries become porous" (Byers 180) as processes of

identification and differentiation are hypostatically mediated, theosis menaces hegemonies premised on

Manichean distinctions. Second, intonations of theosis in *The God of Small Things* question the fixity of

death over life, tempering whispers of Velutha's resurrection within his inchoate transfiguration of the

novel's narrator's hypostatic persona. If one's understanding of Christian soteriology leans heavily

Westward, positioning Velutha as a Christ figure can prove as tempting as it proves tricky. On the one

hand, Velutha is a carpenter with a flair for creating and mending, and his execution attempted to

expatiate Ammu, and her family's social standing, from the consequences of Ammu's caste transgression.

On the other hand, within this soteriological model, what Velutha actually "redeems" remains suspect. To

whatever degree Velutha's death saves Ammu and her family from the fallout of caste transgression, his

death also problematically reifies and endorses caste strictures that much of the novel takes to task. If,

however, our soteriological assumptions focus on theosis before forensics, then we can envisage, within

the narrator's diegetic transfiguration, Velutha's Christological figuration as a hypostatic convergence of

Small Things and Big Things.

2.6 Deixis and the Exposition of Deification

For my purposes, deixis references particular elements of language through which our narrator's

diegesis can be gauged. "Deixis (adjectival form, *deictic*)," notes Mary Galbraith, "is a psycholinguistic

term for those aspects of meaning associated with self-world orientation" (21). Deictic language includes

those seemingly commonplace bits of grammar (in noun form, *deictics*), that "anchor the speaker in

relation to their surroundings and other participants (Trask 66; see also Meyer 70, 82–83; Field 302).

Deictics tend be either personal ("I," "you," "we," "them"), temporal ("now," "then," "yesterday,"

"tomorrow"), or spatial ("here," "there," "away," "this," "that") (Hartley 61): small words, heavily

dependent on context for meaning, yet capable of focalizing and mediating the perspective, locus or

origo of a speaker (Agha 26; D. E. West 4–5), as that *origo* interacts with its environment (Agha 35; Yule

115). "Big" and "small" depend on deixis to accrue meaning, for the "big" tend to be named as such from

the vantage of the small, as the "small" tend to be named as such from the vantage of the "big."

These vague little words similarly tend to require awareness of cultural contexts orienting a

speaker's deixis before these words can accrue specificity.[118] As Mary Galbraith clarifies,

> When philosophers, linguists, and narrative theorists attempt to understand the role of subjectivity
>
> in language and conversely, the role of language in subjectivity, they invariably notice a certain
>
> aspect of language which seems to depend on extralinguistic, subjective, occasion-specific
>
> considerations. Theorists have variously named this aspect of language *egocentric particulars*
>
> (Russell), *shifters* (Jespersen, Jakobsen), *indexical* (Pierce), *token-reflexives* (Reichenbach),
>
> *occasional terms* (Husserl), or *deictics* (Buhler). By these terms, they designate those words and
>
> aspects of language that can only be understood with reference to a NOW, a HERE, and I. (20)

Deictic analysis has significant implications for post-colonial studies: identifying a speaker's "spatio-

temporal" locus (Barnard and Spencer 899)—how it understands "now," "here," and "I"—can be

revealingly tricky in a milieu where the histories and geographies of peoples have been colonized. Take,

for example, Russell West-Pavlov's meticulous critique of the narrative deixis in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's

1967 novel, *A Grain of Wheat*. While specifically detailing how Ngũgĩ s text remains regimented by

colonial strategies of orienting subjectivity, West-Pavlov's critique emerges from broader questions

circumscribing post-colonial deixis (West-Pavlov, "The Politics and Spaces of Voice" 170–71; West-

Pavlov, *Spaces of Fiction / Fictions of Space* 151). Does post-colonial deixis attempt to relocate "here" as

an assumed signifier of the Orient instead of the Occident, or does post-colonial deixis aspire to imagine

"here" beyond Manichean colonial constructs? Does post-colonial deixis attempt to position "now" within

histories measured heavily in colonial formulations of time as linear progression (Collits 67), or does

post-colonial deixis explore alternative ways to imagine history (see Okonkwo 48)?

What is more, questions confronting post-colonial deixis resonate well with the deictic trickiness of the Christ myth. Attempting a deictically-focused deconstruction of Jesus's prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42; Matthew 26:36-56), for example, involves balancing at least the following: distinguishing the deixis of the person praying from the deixis of the person being prayed to; drawing these distinctions without compromising the collocation of Jesus and the Father within the unified being of God; locating the movement of the Holy Spirit during this prayer, while again ensuring that the deictic *origo* ascribed to this person does not sever its personhood from God's identity; then further contextualizing this frenzied deixis within a moment where a small, colonized carpenter is petitioning for intercessory reprieve from one of the biggest empires then known. For my purposes, deixis and its attendant debates assist my exposition of Velutha's Christological trickery in two instrumental, interrelated ways. First, deictic analyses furnish the methodological tools enabling a "broader" diegetic analysis of the narrator's theosis. Deictic analysis can trace the narrator's hypostatic transfiguration into a persona whose diegesis can Christologically, and therefore paradoxically, interlace the deixes of characters who, in the novel's post-colonial setting, are separated by caste, class, gender, racialization and so much more. Second, deictic analyses whisper doubts about death's hold over Velutha: doubts through which Velutha can, paradoxically, be witnessed—and without which my argument regarding the narrator's theotic paradoxes would be far less tenable.

The God of Small Things novelizes its narrative by invoking and contesting conventions associated with an omniscient, unidentified third-person narrator. Like other narrators of this ilk, Roy's narrator can peer within a character's consciousness in a "god-like" manner, almost as if transcending the very narrative through which it speaks itself into existence—almost as if enjoying a location closer to the reader than to the characters. The third-person omniscient narrative perspective, despite its pretense to grand, god-like control and comprehension of the narrative it conveys, actually presents readers with a narrator speaking from a liminal locus somewhere between the reader and the text it narrates. Similarly, third person omniscient narrators are commonly assumed to be "extradiegetic" (Bradford 61), outside the affect of narrative action. But as Richard Bradford demonstrates with convincing detail, these narrators

often evince "intradiegetic" tendencies, sometimes presenting stretches of narrative focalized from a perspective ascribed to characters (60), sometimes appropriating character's turns of phrases into its voice and plane of narration (58), and often ambiguating the vantage of narration by playing tricks with "deictic features of language…which orientate or anchor utterances in the context of space (here verses there; this versus that) or of time (now versus then), relative to the speaker's point of view" (59).

Now, just to be clear, studying deixis in Roy's novel has made me question why relationships between Trinitarian consciousness and the deictic multiplicity of an "omniscient" narrator's diegesis (within the genre of the Western novel) remain widely undertheorized: an omniscient narrator's intradiegetic, paradoxically transcendent and immanent movement within and plural perspectivation of its narrative intimates a dynamism long-ascribed to hypostatic personhood. Nevertheless, connections between Trinitarian thought and the Western novelization of "omniscient" narrative consciousness, while likely rich, take nothing away from my *particular* analysis of post-colonial theosis emergent in Roy's narrator's intradiegetic hypostasis. Her narrator's theosis involves becoming increasingly Velutha-like, directing readers (as I will soon discuss) to recognize the deictic tricks that shape her narrator's engagement with Velutha and, ultimately, outmaneuver the novel's seemingly bigger tricksters.

Admittedly, the deictics circumscribing Velutha's character can easily court problematic readings. Our encounters with Velutha are chiefly focalized, explicitly or implicitly, from the vantage of high-caste characters. Velutha does not even speak until solidly halfway through the novel, and even then, not only are Velutha's words deictically focalized *through* Ammu's *origo*; Velutha's first words deictically direct our attention *away* from himself towards Rahel: "'And look at you!'" he said, looking at her ridiculous frothy frock. 'So beautiful! Getting married?'" (168) These moments, set in the novel's 1960s timeline, are symptomatic of the layered deictic vectors that risk distancing us from Velutha's subjectivity: he is more commonly presented as someone who is seen rather than someone who sees, as someone who is imagined more than someone who imagines. Neither Velutha nor Rahel initially know Ammu is watching them from a distance, as if from "Offstage," (166) and the perception of Rahel's dress as a "ridiculously frothy frock" is not likely Velutha's, despite following his first words. Earlier, Ammu considered the

dress one of fashion's "baffling aberrations" (Roy 130). The first and only account we have of Velutha's

dialogue outside the purview of the Ipe family is in regards to him being seen by the Ipe family,

emphasizing the power held in their deixis (204).

The consequences of such deictic constructions, which seem more disposed to portraying Velutha

as an object of other characters' experiences than as an experiencing subject, risk fatal actualization in

what Victor Li identifies as the problematic "necroidealism" of the "subaltern's sacrificial death" (275).

Li rightly includes readings of *The God of Small Things* when critiquing narratives textured by trenchant

tentativeness about "representing the subaltern that results in the paradoxical condition in which…the

subaltern's death or disappearance enables the subaltern to fulfill the ideal role of the resistant and

inappropriable other" (Li 277). Without tracing the theological provenance of "forensic justification"

(Kharlamov 10), Li's forceful critique targets readings of Roy's novel that foregrounds a "the

martyrology of the abject" (L. C. Fox 35) through which

> Velutha's martyrdom is edifying or salvific only for his author and her readers, not necessarily for
>
> him. Velutha may be The God of Small Things to some, but apotheosis through a brutal death is
>
> surely a pyrrhic outcome. (Li 287)

Agreed. The novel, however, can tell a different story if our assumptions about Velutha's Christological

construction and affect fixate less on redemption secured in brutal death and consider, rather, the

implications of the narrator's deictically intoned doubts as to whether Velutha remains dead. What if the

evasive deixis of Velutha's construction intimates different Christological tricks, ones that disturb

dynamics of identification through which, according to Li, the subaltern too-commonly dies (and remains

dead) to generate literary affect? If we can resist too-quickly shooing away niggling scepticisms about the

finality of Velutha's death, those scepticisms can erode the imposing charge of necroidealism.

If we consider the influence of the Bible's trickster deity on Velutha's literary figuration, the way

Velutha is deictically distanced can signal more than an objectification of Velutha and an idealization of

his corpse. The God of the Bible, the Christ myth it manifests, and Velutha share a penchant for deictic

evasiveness and paradoxes. As Claudia Welz observes, "due to *deixis,"* theosis involves a paradoxical

"double movement of revelation and concealment" (47; see also 26-27) because if God is invisible, then becoming more God-like involves entifying this divine invisibility. Wendy Farley contends Christians must venture an "ascent into imageless darkness," witness the "simultaneity of otherness and sameness" (an affront to colonial codification), then recognize divine identity "in the infinite diversity of actual faces" (an affront to colonial racism) (181). In more straightforward language, with no less mystical significance, Terry Eagleton frames this paradox by identifying our imaginations as the site in which God's revelation is concealed (Eagleton 187). We see Velutha mostly through other characters' eyes, as if through a glass darkly; but what if our rheumy view of Velutha, like our view of certain Biblical precursors, paradoxically purposes concealment as a vehicle for revelation? Bringing such recognition to Roy's novel, perhaps we can begin rendering small "fragments of divine love from their hiddenness" (Lalonde 25)

Among the many Biblical references to God's hiddenness, disguise or concealment, consider how the following sampling bespeaks the paradoxes attending such references. To the nomads Abraham and Jacob, God appears in the paradoxically familiar figures of nomadic strangers (Genesis 18:2). He appears to Moses most famously as a bush that's on fire but not burning (Exodus 3:1-15), ultimately identifying himself using a deictic construct that indicates a "circle instead of a name" (MacKendrick 89).[119] As one contributor to Proverbs asserts, "The glory of God conceals things," working in curious cross-purposes to the subordinate "glory of kings" which "searches out things" (Proverbs 25:2 ESV). Unless there is a higher paradox at play, the glorification of one entails denying the glorification of the other (note that it is not a king's sin to search out what God conceals; it's his glory). Nevertheless, according to Biblical record, the proverb does not seem to have been lost on kings as associations between divinity and concealment surface in political offices and policies. One of King David's "mighty men" was named Eliahba (2 Samuel 23:8,32), which means "God conceals" (Youngblood 350). And "God hides himself" was one of four confessions "emphatically" demanded of foreigners, as Gary V. Smith's study of "national" religion in Isaiah 45 argues (270). Whereas hiddenness, in broad post-colonial contexts, may understandably connote the repression, occlusion or silencing of otherness, in Biblical contexts

hiddenness can characterize divinity. Indeed, the image of God "hiding his face"—which is the first narrative action ascribed to Velutha (A. Roy, *The God of Small Things* 68)—is a common Biblical euphemism for God's judgment. No wonder Jesus had such a penchant for being circumspect about his identity (Mark 8:27-30, Luke 24:13-35, and many others). He tells his disciples they can recognize God where God may seem least recognizable: among the marginalized (Matthew 25:40). He tells his disciple, Thomas, that he values the faith of those who have not seen him over the faith of those who have (John 20:29). And true to his word, he reveals his power to Paul by blinding him (Acts 9).

3. Doubt: A Literary Exposition of Things Seen Differently

The heart of my literary analysis—my comparison of two leitmotifs, followed by a comparison of Pappachi and Velutha—foregroundss the post-colonial purchase of Christic tricksters. However, before I can venture deictic analyses of intradiegetic theosis, it would be helpful to clarify how such analyses are critically primed by the unconventionally patterned deixis of the novel's opening pages. Roy's novel opens by drawing heightened attention to deixis as an instrument of narration, and this heightened attention shapes our engagement with the deictics circumscribing the novel's characters and leitmotifs. Sampling the early complexity of the narrative's deictic tricks demonstrates the attentive hermeneutics the novel demands.

The first chapter of *The God of Small Things* introduces readers to a narrative that unfolds from a vague, if not evasive *origo*—one prone to coyness marking its cultural politics, counter-intuitiveness marking its deictic orientations, and inconclusiveness marking its focalizations of characters' experiences. Given these challenges, Roy's coherent novelization of her narrator's persona would alone be a stunning literary trick. What's more striking, however, is that this coherence is achieved neither by shying away from coyness, reorienting counter-intuitive deictics, nor by aggressively distilling narrative focalization to distinguish a "pure" deictic *origo*. Rather, *The God of Small Things* demonstrates how these unconventional narrative manoeuvres can coherently *and* compellingly explore difficult post-colonial paradoxes of naming, of rethinking "always-already" distinctions between things big and things small.

The novel's opening chapter prepares readers for a text in which narrative timelines liberally flip between the present and pasts, the latter presented variously as characters' flashbacks, the narrator's recollections, "straight" narration in the same tense as the narrative present, and sometimes a deictically fluid — if not diegetically paradoxical — mixture of all three. With that caution in mind, the novel opens in the narrative present, with a present-tense description of spring and early summer in the novel's principal setting, the town of Ayemenem. The setting quickly challenges readers to distinguish between "dustgreen trees," "mossgreen" walls, and the "immodest green" of the countryside (1). When I try to envision shades distinguishing green dust from green moss, my envisioning subsumes the vague vantages whence one can imagine seeing these colours. In contrast, envisioning an "immodest green" proves more deictically demanding, for it is a description that emerges from a cultural consciousness embedded within the diegesis of a narrator with whom we are still unfamiliar. Whereas the previous greens were empirical descriptions with implicit cultural connotations, "immodest" is an explicit, culturally circumscribed censure that more heavily depends on an imagining the *origo* of its enunciation. But readers as yet do not know enough about the narrator's persona to understand what "immodest" might signify. "Immodest" signals an early instance of hermeneutic ambiguity similarly peppered across the novel: when the narrative persona uses a subjective adjective, how are we to imagine the narrative persona's elusive and unconventional subjectivity?

"Boundaries blur," notes the narrator, detailing the irrepressible landscape's capacity to "root" and "bloom" its own fences, to "snake up electric poles," "burst through laterite," "spill across the flooded roads"—even populating pothole puddles with "small fish"(1). Immediately following this lush description, Rahel is introduced as a character who "came back"—not "*went* back"—to Ayemenem (from America after many years, we later learn). Although "came" deictically suggests Rahel is returning to a locally situated narrative *origo*, the deictic vantage in this paragraph quickly and paradoxically flips: the passage does not narrate Rahel's "coming back" from the vantage of the home to which she is returning; instead, the narrator unfolds descriptions of this house from the perspective of one approaching it, *without* ever explicitly ascribing this perspective to Rahel (as in, "Rahel saw…"). Juggling deictics

simultaneously align Rahel's perspective with those of the reader and the narrator's persona: on the one hand, images of the Ayemenem house are narrated to us in the order that they appear to Rahel; on the other hand, these images echo the novel's opening—including descriptions of moss-streaked walls and a garden hosting life that exceeds its boundaries (4)—presented just a few paragraphs earlier from a "wide angle" perspective typically ascribed to on omniscient *origo*. These narrative alignments quickly come into question when descriptions of the Ayemenem landscape, as it traversed by Rahel's twin brother, Estha, sharply depart from descriptions that had accompanied Rahel:

> Some days he walked along the banks of the river that smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin rot and had broken out in boils. (14)

Interpreting these incongruities would be simpler, firstly, if differing perceptions of this landscape were explicitly ascribed to Rahel and Estha. Then we could assume these incongruities disclosed insights regarding the hermeneutic filters fashioned into each character's subjectivity. These incongruities, however, are delivered by the third person narrator: that is, delivered within a plane of novelized narration conventionally expected to be consistent, if not "objective." Early on in the novel, Roy's tricky narrator thus demonstrates the difficult-but-promising dynamism of its ongoing theosis: the narrator's *origo*'s deepening hypostasis increasingly "embodies" the pathos of those invited to participate in its subjectivity. Rather than imagining Roy's narrator as a persona constituted by its "static" being, imagine Roy's narrator as a persona animated by a process of theotic *becoming,* which affords more latitude for its paradoxical deixis.

Second, the significance of the differing narrative perspectives associated with Rahel and Estha is that as children, these characters mystically shared a diegesis that now seems disrupted. Consider how Roy's narrator begins introducing this deictic paradox using straightforward, third-person storytelling conventions before quickly tinkering with configurations of narrative deixis, effectively enlisting the style of narration to accent the signification of narrative content:

In those early amorphous years…Esthappen and Rahel thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. . . .

Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha's funny dream.

She has other memories too that she has no right to have.

She remembers, for instance (though, she hadn't been there), what the Orangdrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches—*Estha's* sandwiches that *Estha* ate—on the Madras Mail to Madras.

And these are only the small things.

Anyway, now she thinks of Estha and Rahel as *Them*, because separately, the two of them are no longer what *They* were or ever thought *They'd* be.

Ever.

Their lives have a size and shape now. Estha has his and Rahel hers.

Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits have appeared like a team of trolls on their separate horizons. Short creatures with long shadows, patrolling the Blurry End. (5 emphasis in original)

Because Rahel's memories—the Abhilash talkies, the tomato sandwiches—*foreshadow* events detailed later in the novel, readers must foregrounds and test assumptions about temporal deixis as we move chronologically *backwards* in the "fabula" plane of narrative in order, paradoxically, to follow the novel's progression. As readers, we will find ourselves emulating Estha's and Rahel's childhood trick of reading backwards, laughing at the admonishment this trick received from a visiting, comically racist Australian missionary who, without an awareness of the irony laden in deictics (to accompany her ignorance that Malayalam is a language) made the twins write, "*In future we will not read backwards"* three hundred times (58).

The challenge of reading backwards is further perplexed by our later realization that fizzy soda and sandwiches—supposedly "only the small things"—actually reference Estha's traumatic sexual assault

and sudden exile. In implied contrast to *only* these "small things," the passage suggests Rahel also shares a memory that more deeply haunts Estha: as we will learn, the memory of seeing and betraying an already-bloodied Velutha, which this narrator here intimates (again, by implied contrast) is a "big thing." As the novel proceeds, however, the multiple significations and connotations distinguishing "small" from "big" become a site for considerable narrative negotiation. Readers encounter lower-case "big things" and "small things," upper-case "Big Things" and "Small Things," a "Big God" and "Small God," the "God of Big Things" (not necessarily the 'Big God') and Velutha. If these multiple and ambiguous invocations of "small" and "big" evinced a fractured (or fracturing) narrative persona, the novel might well have been dismissed as unreadable instead of garnering critical praise. Roy's novel *works* because the complexity of its post-colonial locus emerges in the story of a protean narrator's persona coming to terms with a hypostatic envisaging of paradox. Set against Macaulayist anxieties, Roy's narrator exemplifies an operose post-colonial subjectivity, one less intimidated by its liminality and more inclined to espy the purchase of its paradoxes.

Continuing with my exposition regarding the novel's early deictic mischievousness, consider the gap or lacuna between "And these are only the small things" and "Anyway, now she thinks of Estha and Rahel…" (5). The first deictic pronoun after the lacuna—"she"—should by conventional anaphora refer to Rahel, who was the previous character, within the same narrative timeline, identified with a proper name. But "she" refers to Rahel's grandaunt, Baby Kochamma, who was introduced several paragraphs and one lacuna ago. Stretching this anaphora not only tests the horizon of a reader's deictic memory, it embroils the deictic "they" in multiple paradoxes. Peggy Kamuf's explication of Jacques Derrida's use of the deictic "*this*" in his response to Martin Heidegger's strategies of sexualized differentiation provides a helpful model for my analysis of "they" in the cited passage:

> Derrida traces another typographical gesture in the same passage. There is also use of italics that marks out "*this* sexual difference" for special emphasis. I would suggest the deictic "this" receives its emphasis by force of dissemination. . . Specifically, it re-marks the difference or division at the site of the deixis, which is the index of a gesture, the possibility of any reference to

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this here and of any relation of this "this" to itself. It thus situates the dividing limit at which

every ipseity, every "this, here, now" is posed and exposed, displaced into another "this," into

another's here and now…This "this" uncannily appropriates and expropriates the ipseity of every

"myself" when it divides its mark, on the page, and splits its location, deforming the former space

of binary opposition. (102)

Derrida's "*this*" concentrates his subjectivity-as-author in the particular, small locus of this enunciation

while, paradoxically, disseminating his subjectivity beyond the bigger assumed binaries in which his

enunciation emerges. Similarly, Roy's narrator first introduces us to Rahel and Estha as "they" (4), then

later as the capitalized, italicized "*Them"* to emphasize, firstly, that deictic focalization has shifted from

Rahel's and Estha's earlier capitalized "We or Us" (4). More importantly, because Baby Kochamma's

"*Them*" resembles the capitalized "We or Us"—pronouns cased in the conventions of proper nouns—the

deictic "*Them*" connotes a trenchant deictic unity even as the sentence denotes a fragmentation of the

twins' subjectivity, re-marking, as Kamuf put it, "difference or division at the site of the deixis" (102).

Baby Kochamma's "*Them*" is soon followed by a series of capitalized points of deictic

orientation—"Edges, Borders, Boundaries, Brinks and Limits"—that similarly tinker with basic linguistic

conventions. Not only are these orientators personified as European imps—"trolls . . . with long

shadows," small things casting big silhouettes—they *move* ("patrolling the Blurry End") despite

paradoxically connoting markers of fixity, especially in a sentence that clusters borders, boundaries, limits

and the like for mutual emphasis. These patrolling trolls betoken the narrator's macabre humour; they are

indeterminately menacing absurdities generously spiced with wry irony: shifting "Brinks" and roaming

"Limits" as unfixed as the liminal "Blurry End" of individuated subjectivity they are nonsensically tasked

with cementing. "Blurry End," however, besides suggesting horizons of consciousness are porous,

discloses a different deictic axis being policed, one traceable in the temporal deixis suggested by the

"long shadows" these sentry trolls cast. In the tropics, shadows are longest at twilight, a moment of

temporal liminality, of transition. Because movement is measured over space and time, "Boundaries"

mobilize to keep Rahel and Estha from re-engaging a necessary temporal liminality without which there

can be no tomorrow and new twilight.[120] Roy's narrator's lyrically intricate and quickly shifting deictic tricks not only typify the complexity of its post-colonial deixis, they evoke an emergent theosis in the narrator's diegesis—a concern towards which we now turn.

2.7 The Inheritance of Ambiguity: Comparing "Skyblue" and "Blue Sky Church"

The God of Small Things liberally uses several leitmotifs, often to paradoxical ends, variously threading them through timelines, diegetically repositioning them, subtly morphing and interconnecting them until they vaguely assume the literary function of a trope. The following exposition contrasts two of these trope tricks—involving the prominent leitmotif "skyblue," and the less frequent leitmotif "blue church sky"—to explore the transfiguring, theotic conjunction of things big and things small within the narrator's deixis. The adjective "skyblue" appears twenty times in *The God of Small Things* eight times to signify explicitly the Ipe family's "skyblue Plymouth"; five times to associate "skyblue" implicitly with this Plymouth (as in "He slammed the skyblue door shut"); four times to describe a December day; and five times to describe the actual sky (…which adds up to twenty-one references, not twenty, because one of these references is multiply purposed more forthrightly than are other references). With every narrative invocation, "skyblue" accrues increasingly sinister, deictically vexing connotations with bigness; and yet, tellingly, the narrator retires "skyblue" about halfway through the novel. What gave the adjective such early currency, by what was it supplanted, and what might its loss of diegetic purchase tell us about the narrator's theosis?

We first encounter the "skyblue Plymouth" at the start of *The God of Small Things,* set in the novel's narrative present, as an object Rahel recognizes while approaching her family's home. Although connotations associated with "skyblue" are as yet inchoate, the term quickly begins to accrue currency as it introduces and anticipates a range of paradoxical associations. The "skyblue Plymouth" is next described in the novel's 1960s timeline as it drives through a "skyblue day in December"—a moment quickly disabused of positive associations when immediately and ominously described as the kind of time in the life of a family when something happens to nudge its hidden morality from its resting place and

make it bubble to the surface and float for a while. In clear view. For everyone to see" (35). The "skyblue day" suggests an unwanted exposure that is deictically indiscriminate. The "skyblue Plymouth" is described speeding "past young rice fields and old rubber trees" that are quickly juxtaposed with the similar but war-torn landscape of Viet Nam, a "small country" bombed heavily enough to cover its "jungles, rivers, rice fields, Communists" in "six inches of steel" (35). Awareness of not-so-distant neo-imperialist incursions are not focalized from a character's *origo*; they are presumably posited by a deictically "transcendent" third-person narrator imbuing the "skyblue Plymouth" with similarly ill-omened associations as "skyblue day." And yet, the narrator seems to share paradoxical associations with "big" and "small" that will also riddle the characters: "sky" connotes something bigger than a secret can be nudged to bubble and float beneath it, just as a war in the coyly-described "small country" actually references something bigger than an element of scenery contextualizing a country drive in Kerala. When later invocations of "skyblue" are more suggestively focalized from the loci of characters, the bitter, lingering aftertaste of these early, paradoxical connotations laces the affect of their invocations. Otherwise put, future and recurring invocations of "skyblue" evince a hypostatic "humanization" of the narrator's omniscient diegesis alongside a hypostatic "deification" of the experiences of characters as these experiences are *assumed* (in the Christian theological sense of word) into the narrator's deixis.

We next encounter the "skyblue Plymouth" as the narrator takes us back again to an even earlier timeline, when Chacko and Baby Kochamma were in their twenties, and Pappachi purchased the car for reasons the narrator unsparingly satirizes with a deictic twist. Retired, crestfallen by the dismissal over his most significant discovery as an entomologist, violently jealous of his wife's growing pickle business, unable to channel his jealously into continued physical abuse when physically threatened by his son, Chacko, Pappachi ridiculously attempts to arrest fears of further "emasculation" by buying the car, used, from "an old Englishman in Munnar" (47). The car "was Pappachi's revenge": he forbade anyone inside it, flaunting his power to erect fresh boundaries, to enjoy a position of exclusivity as he daily drove down Ayemenem's "narrow road looking outwardly elegant but sweating freely inside his woolen suits" (47). Pappachi: the second-hand brown Englishman who purchases a big Plymouth because he didn't get credit

for naming a small moth, who parades a performance of patriarchy while perspiring in formal English attire to satisfy whatever sick hunger he once appeased by regularly assaulting his wife with a brass vase.

It seems impolitic to laugh too easily at the clownishness of Pappachi in his Plymouth; we know enough about the context that spurred this clownishness to recognize a strain of gallows humour, one appealing to a deictic proximity we are not as yet certain we enjoy. Gallows humour, as Paul Lewis clarifies, can demonstrate characters' capacity to "create distance from [their] pain, to liberate [them], at least temporarily, from otherwise inescapable torment"; to assert "independence from the brutalizing conditions of life" (*Comic Effects* 80). Such gallows in-jokes can foster survivors' "intra-group bonding" (Brewster 239) and, therefore, license the quality of our laughter depending on how[121] deictically "intra" we are with the "group." Attempts at such orientation are impeded by quickly juxtaposing deictic perspectives that are not focalized from characters' narrative loci, intoning a "transcendent" third person narrative *origo* capable of knowing Pappachi was "looking outwardly elegant" (referencing a public perception of his pageantry) while he was "sweating freely" (referencing an intimate concealment to which an aforementioned public was not purview). However, as the novel proceeds to deepen details of Pappachi's cruelties, needling our suspicions that Pappachi's outward elegance failed to conceal his sweatiness from his family as effectively as it had from those he drove by, we also suspect the narrator's gallows humour *does* focalize the intra-group bonding of the family who survived him. This deferred focalization may not ease the nervousness of our laughter, for Pappachi's skyblue-riding clownishness is a gallows humour "punch-line" that mostly precedes a still-unfolding "joke," but it well demonstrates how extradiegetic and focalized narrative perspectives are subject to hypostatic flux. "Skyblue," far from being an adjective enjoying consistent significations, let alone consistent connotations, functions as a deictically "locative adjective" (Mead 112–13) evincing theotic dynamism.

Critical to this dynamism is the increasing, unsettling personification of the skyblue Plymouth's early connotations. When blocked and surrounded by a passing Communist parade-cum-protest, one notably demanding lower-caste workers not be explicitly addressed by caste category,[122] "the skyblue

Plymouth looked absurdly opulent on the narrow, pitted road" like "Baby Kochamma in church, on her way to the bread and wine" (63). The Communists look at the Plymouth from the same vantage Christians look at Baby Kochamma (who, like her father, is more concerned with the pageantry of transit than its destination). The car is then animalized—denuded of Pappachi's haughtiness, reduced to a spectacle of imprisonment and penury—after a passing marcher's slam springs open its "skyblue bonnet," leaving it looking like "an angular animal in a zoo asking to be fed" (67). As the skyblue Plymouth continues to convoke and eerily conjoin allusions to Baby Kochamma and animals, the car is even assigned a deictic *origo*: parked in the hotel, the "skyblue Plymouth gossiped with other, smaller cars" like a "big lady at a small ladies party" (108); parked in the airport, loosely presented from Sophie Mol's deictic locus, the "skyblue Plymouth with tailfins had a smile for Sophie Mol. A chromebumpered sharksmile" (145). Considering Baby Kochama was instrumental in falsely implicating Velutha for Sophie's Mol's drowning, the confluence of these allusions proves foreboding. Recounting the car's return from the airport, the narrator's final pairing of "skyblue" and "Plymouth" lacks conventional deictic markers that might focalize the drive from a character's *origo*, although descriptions of the car "crunch[ing]," "crushing" and "shattering" (164) small shells and pebbles reinforce associations of the skyblue Plymouth with the violence things big casually visit on things small.

Besides being pulled into the orbit of these associations and their deictic diversity, other invocations of "skyblue" also suggest an increasingly unsettling artifice in which simulacra describe the real. From the perspective of a cinema audience, an opening scene from *The Sound of Music* is memorable for its "skyblue (car-colored) Austrian sky" (95). From the perspective of the expectant relatives in the regional airport, passengers on Sophie Mol's flight have travelled across the "skyblue Bombay-Cochin sky" (132), that is, a sky described in utilitarian terms as a flight corridor, a site of transition. And from Rahel's perspective, the same flight is described as "the screaming steel bird in the skyblue sky" (133), rendering the plane a symbol of violent artifice crossing a sky the colour of car paint. By the time we encounter the final invocation of "skyblue sky" (195), under which the twins as children

discover an abandoned, rickety rowboat on the river's banks, our nerves have been conditioned to trigger unsettling premonitions:

> Two happy hearts soared like colored kites in a skyblue sky. But then, in a slow green whisper,
>
> the river (with fish in it, with the sky and trees in it), bubbled in. (195)

Repetition of the preposition "in" hypostatically orients this final invocation of "skyblue sky" along multiple deictic vectors of encounter.

The first "in" suggests an awareness of "happy hearts" narrated from a third person perspective focalizing the twins' experience, but this narrative deixis is complicated by the semblance between "happy hearts soared" and the earlier description of how, in *The Sound of Music*, a "camera soared up in the skyblue (car-colored) Austrian sky" (95). Because the soaring camera is presented from the deictic locus of the film's audience, including the twins whose desire for whiteness enmeshes their affection for the film (100), the twins' perception of "soaring happiness" includes the impossibility of its realization. Furthermore, considering the suspicious connotations "skyblue" has accrued, the narrator's invocation of this leitmotif suggests leeriness about the twins' happy hearts and, in so doing, presents a single sentence in which the narrative persona is assuming[123] paradoxical deictic loci sequenced into linguistic comprehensibility. Continuing: the second "in" does not deictically reference a space; it references a process (a whisper) by synesthetically pairing a temporal adjective ("slow") with a visual adjective ("green") to crisscross deictic axes of perception. The third "in" refers to real fish in the river, quickly followed by the fourth "in" presented in a grammatically parallel clause despite referring metaphorically to a reflection of the sky—no longer "skyblue." Paradoxically, this reflection is more "realistic" than what it reflects, as if cleansed of artifice. The narrative focalization in this scene aligns with the deixis of the twins, but as the deictic parallelism narrating (small) "fish" and (big) "sky" slides between empiricism and metaphor, the deictic daedal spawned by the previous sentence's synesthesia continues to swell.

We know something is awry when the paragraph's final "in" refers to the river as it "bubbled in" to soaring "happy hearts." Reading "two happy hearts" as synecdoches for the twins, the metaphor bedevils us with an image of significant deictic distance—between river and sky—leaving us wondering

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how the former can "bubble in" to what's "soaring" above it. The passage, however, does not mix metaphors; it extends and reworks images paired earlier: of a "skyblue day" overseeing "hidden morality…bubble to the surface" in "clear view" (35), like the reflection of a skyblue sky stripped of its artifice. "Skyblue," let alone "skyblue sky" are never mentioned again, leitmotifs abandoned halfway through a novel styled by varieties of repetition, signaling more than changes in the tools of storytelling: signaling a change in the amorphous story of the teller's deictically orchestrated, diegetic theosis.

In contrast to "skyblue," the narrator repeats the leitmotif "blue church sky" only four times. Invocations of the latter leitmotif, despite being "smaller" in terms of frequency, not only outlive their similar-but-"bigger" leitmotif, they more extensively coalesce and foregrounds soteriological dimensions of the narrator's hypostatic diegesis. Both "skyblue" and "blue sky church" draw our attention to the vulnerable humanity of characters, but the latter continues to transfigure that vulnerability into a hypostatic openness, "a radical openness," in the words of Marc Lalonde, "to the opportunities for love which cannot be managed as if it were a factory project" (Lalonde 25). Every invocation of "church blue sky" alludes to Velutha (three explicitly, one implicitly). Compared to "skyblue," the "blue church sky" leitmotif fiddles more intricately with denotations and connotations of smallness and bigness. The latter leitmotif tests more intensely already-stretched deictic conventions of narrative diegesis. The latter leitmotif more comfortably leagues itself with its paradoxical connotations, including darkness, death and trickery. "Church blue sky" discloses a post-colonial hopefulness perhaps as difficult to recognize as it is to realize unless one flirts with one's tiny doubts about the finality of Velutha's death, well aware that the novel's trickster Christology risks transfiguring small flirtations into bigger leaps of faith.

We are introduced to "blue sky church" in the 1960s timeline from deictically disorienting vantages during Sophie Mol's funeral. Rahel, "brittle with exhaustion from her battle against Real Life. . . noticed Sophie Mol was awake for her funeral" (7), and it was Sophie Mol "lying in a coffin looking up" (7) who first draws Rahel's attention to the church ceiling newly "painted blue like the sky, with…tiny whizzing jet planes with white trails that crisscrossed in the clouds" (7). Readers may be understandably inclined to assume the deixis at play here is attempting to focalize the detached-from-reality perspective

of a traumatized, exhausted child. The consequence of this assumption, however, tests the diegesis of

Roy's supposedly omniscient narrator: moments after we are told Rahel "noticed" Sophie Mol was awake

we are told Rahel, envisioning the ceiling's painter, "*imagined* him up there, someone like

Velutha…painting silver jets in a blue church sky" (8, my emphasis). The narrator quickly signals an

awareness distinguishing "noticing" and "imagining," which tinges the former with a disorienting realism

further nurtured by the similarly flat, realist tone in which "noticed" and "imagined" are presented (as if

trusting the latter tricks us into lending a small measure of unanticipated credibility to the former). Upon

envisioning Velutha painting the ceiling, Rahel's imagination quickly returns to a memory, rooted in the

deictic consciousness she shares with Estha, as she envisions Velutha "dropping like a dark star out of the

sky that he had made. Lying broken on the hot church floor, dark blood spilling from his skull like a

secret"[124] (8). On Sophie Mol's cue, Rahel's focus turns to a vision of a "small black bat" climbing up

Baby Kochamma's "expensive funeral sari"—slapstick antics ensuing—before the bat "flew into the sky

and turned into a jet plane without a crisscrossed trail" (8). Considering Velutha is associated with his

blackness (70, 76, 169, 205), including the just-made reference to him as a "dark star," reading the "small

black bat" as a metaphor for Velutha correlates him with the broad narrative arc of the trickster Christ

myth. He creates the heavens from which he descends, dies cruelly because of a cross, and then, with a

flair for toying with things big (consider Baby Kochamma's associations with the Plymouth), ascends

back to those heavens without leaving a crisscrossed trail. Early into the novel, the emergent leitmotif

"blue church sky" simultaneously signals a Christological association with Velutha, suggests a trickster-

worthy encounter between small things and big things, and invites doubts regarding the assumed

immutability and fidelity of the third-person narrator's deixis. For a narrator who traffics doubt as a

paradoxical currency of hope, such doubts are big deals.

We next encounter this leitmotif narrativized within a timeline set days *previous* to Sophie Mol's

funeral. "D'yknow how to sashay," Sophie Mol asked her cousins upon being picked up from the airport:

> And the three of them, led by Sophie Mol, sashayed across the airport car park, swaying like
>
> fashion models. . .

Damp dwarfs walking tall.

Shadows followed them. Silver jets in a blue church sky, like moths in a beam of light. (145)
The collocation of "dwarfs" with "shadows" harkens the image of "trolls casting long shadows,"
demonstrating Roy's narrator's willingness to draw on sneakily similar images and deictics whose actual,
inchoate, wispy interconnectedness can prove less developed than their semblances suggest. The
narrator's reliance, sometimes heavily, on fuzzy evocation manifests and paradoxically clarifies the
novel's suspicion towards certainties secured via hermeneutic enclosures, endemic to colonial
categorizing, while compellingly haunting readers with possibilities of a connectedness as-yet beyond the
spectrum of our recognition. Given this caveat, our remaining encounters with "blue church sky" establish
narrative connections that work *because* they are viscous and labile, not because they are rigid and
cocksure.

The cited passage messes with conventions of narrative deixis in more ways than one. The
rhythm of the passage, which focuses on the actions of the children, might understandably incline us to
assume "silver jets in a blue church sky" refers to the children. But it is hard to be certain. "Damp dwarfs
walking tall" is a single-sentence paragraph narrated in the active voice, as were the children's preceding
actions, followed by another two-sentence paragraph that also opens in the active voice ("Shadows
followed them") but switches the agentive subjects, and the deictic *origo*, from "damp dwarfs" to their
"shadows" ominously stalking them. Besides delicately disrupting the pattern of narration, the close
pairing of this opening sentence with the blue church sky leitmotif in the sentence that follows it suggests
the cruciform "[silver] jets" prefacing this invocation of the leitmotif could refer to the shadows, the
children, or both. On the one hand, because the leitmotif is invoked as a sentence fragment with no
governing predicate, we expect it remains predicated by the sentence about shadows preceding it. On the
other hand, because the narrator strips this sentence fragment of simple deictics designed to avoid such
ambiguations regarding referencing and predication, readers find themselves in the familiar place of
engaging a narrative that risks unnerving us by courting hermeneutic multiplicity (and therefore
uncertainty) embedded in the rule-breaking grammar of its narration. In *The God of Small Things*, the

"misplaced modifier," typically a deictic transgression of grammar effecting ambiguation, is paradoxically transfigured into a literary technique evincing the narrator's intradiegetic, hypostatic dynamism.

The deictic dynamism of these ambiguations is further amplified by the passive voice in the sentence preceding the second invocation of the "blue church sky" leitmotif. On the one hand, the passive voice is a familiar grammatical tool for third-person narrators because it more easily accommodates narration from an "omniscient" vantage, endowing narrators with the authority such a grand vantage connotes, including the authority to occlude, transcend, contradict or otherwise distinguish how narration emerging from its *origo* eclipses narration more closely focalized from a character's locus. *The God of Small Things*, however, infuses its third-person deixis with Christological tricks. Consider: we were introduced to "blue church sky" as it was envisioned within Rahel's imagination, hidden (mostly) from the purview of other characters, as if intimately inscribed in her consciousness. When this leitmotif is next invoked by the narrator, unmediated by a character's deixis, the ambiguations between the *origo* of the narrator and the characters evince the messy workings of hypostatic theosis.

"Shadows," besides denoting darkness, leave no footprints — as was once expected of Paravans (A. Roy, *The God of Small Things* 71). Like the leitmotifs "skyblue and "blue church sky, the refrain "leave no footprints" is invoked frequently and almost always associated with Velutha. Searching for Velutha in these shadows would seem like a stretch, an act of expository desperation, if this shadow imagery was not immediately followed by the rare, explicitly Christic "blue church sky" leitmotif, drawing out the Christological associations silhouetted in these shadows. Both images reference death—the jet streaks are a cross and light beams are no friends of moths—but their broader connotations are paradoxically juxtaposed and enjoined: small moths allude to Pappachi, the Macaulayist patriarch; and big jets extend allusions to Velutha, the subaltern carpenter, introduced from the previous sentence's shadows. Although Pappachi and Velutha represent widely contrasting worlds of post-colonial India, the ambiguated deixis of the cited passage enables a collusion of their allusions. Velutha and Pappachi enjoy more deictic proximity as words in the cited sentences, as characters evoked in the imagination of the

narrator and the reader, than they likely could in the flesh. This second invocation of the "blue church sky" leitmotif may be overtly ominous, but it is also laced with traces of ambiguous hope that increasingly develop, in the final two invocations of the leitmotif, into a hopeful ambiguity.

The third invocation of "blue sky church" occurs within Ammu's dream. Beyond intimately focalizing action from a character's vantage, the narration of this dream more intensely immerses readers in Ammu's deixis. Her dream is narrated from the same vantage of a third-person narrator, in prose that closely resembles and sometimes explicitly reproduces the cadence and imagery characterizing the narrator's prose. The significant kenosis of narrative authority into the deixis of Ammu's dream is further circumstantiated when we realize this dream-sequence occurs in a chapter titled "The God of Small Things" and marks the first instance of a character recognizing Velutha as The God of Small Things. Most significantly, for my purposes, this may be our third encounter with the "blue church sky" leitmotif, but its invocation here is actually its *first* within the novel's chronological narrative. Ammu's dream occurs during the afternoon of Sophie Mol's arrival, *before* Rahel invoked the leitmotif during Sophie Mol's funeral. Although neither Ammu nor Rahel know they share an intimate leitmotif, one that each has secreted in her respective imagination, the narrator's theosis enjoins these leitmotifs within a Christological diegesis that does not efface, but instead hypostatically integrates, the specificity and subjectivity of each character's deixis.

Consider how the deictics in Ammu's dreamed leitmotif nurture this paradox:

She could have touched his body lightly with her fingers . . . Carelessly, over those burnished chocolate ridges. And left patterned trails of bumpy gooseflesh on his body, like flat chalk on a blackboard, like a swathe of breeze in a paddyfield, like jet streaks in a blue church-sky. . . He could have touched her too. But he didn't, because in the gloom beyond the oil lamp, in the shadows, there were metal folding chairs arranged in a ring and on the chairs there were people, with slanting rhinestone sunglasses, watching. They all held polished violins under their chins, the bows poised at identical angles. (206)

Ammu's initially protean recognition of Velutha is abetted not only by what she sees, but by the awareness she shares with Velutha of being encircled, observed and judged by figurations of Ammu's mother, Mammachi, the blind violinist. Ammu knows what's "in the gloom beyond the oil lamp" because it's her dream; but how Velutha knows, we don't know. Similarly, when the blind violinists are described as "watching," we can assume they are "watching" as in "keeping watch." In Ammu's dream, these figures' anxious awareness of each other seems disturbingly mediated by their mutual inability to see each other. Even Ammu seems affected by this dynamic: she imagines Velutha as incomplete, "a one-armed man…" (207). But that's not the only way she imagines him, and considering the politics of occlusion in this dream's deixis, what Ammu *can* see stands out. In Ammu's dream, Velutha's embodiment of the "blue church-sky" leitmotif challenges us to "read backwards" and recognize Velutha's presence heterogeneously intoned in the narrator's hypostatic theosis, in the transfiguring diegesis of its literary devices and character constructs. Velutha's body bears a cross, not only as an instrument of execution that paradoxically signals life, but also as an emblem of eroticized communion denied. Because Rahel did not envision Velutha erotically, and the novel offers no quarter to pedophiles (51, 190), conjoining Rahel's and Ammu's feelings for Velutha in a shared leitmotif might seem counterintuitive. Christological meditations on theosis, however, remind us that the deep reciprocity between the poetics of incarnation and the poetics of theosis emphasizes the particularity of transfiguration, if not its existential immediacy. As Chronic observes, "For the child, *theosis*…means that participation in God is accessible to the child as a child" (182). Shared love for Velutha need not efface the diversity of desires ignited in pursuit of that love; indeed, as I hope my exposition continues to survey, a character's distinctiveness can vividly emerge in their expression or repression of that shared love.

In that vein, my discussion now briefly turns to the final invocation of the "blue church sky" leitmotif and the theosis evoked in the eroticism blurring boundaries between Ammu and Velutha.[125] We encounter the leitmotif in the novel's last chapter, surrounded by language lifted straight from Ammu's dream:

That first night, on the day that Sophie Mol came, Velutha watched his lover dress. When she was ready she squatted facing him. She touched him lightly with her fingers and left a trail of goosebumps on his skin. Like flat chalk on a blackboard. Like breeze in a paddyfield. Like jet-streaks in a blue church sky. He took her face in his hands and drew it towards his. He closed his eyes and smelled her skin. Ammu laughed. (321)

This passage gathers and repeats images and leitmotifs that were spread across the novel and focalized from multiple, seemingly incommensurable loci. The familiarity of these literary elements and narrative techniques, however, may lull us into missing how this passage witnesses a critical juncture in the narrator's progressing theosis. We suspect the narrator now "sees" Velutha differently than the narrator previously had, but our suspicions are not sparked by the narrator's descriptions of Velutha. Our suspicions are sparked by narrator's rising willingness or ability to recognize Velutha's deixis, as witnessed in the cited passage (and extended as the chapter and the novel conclude). This final invocation of "blue church sky" alludes to a similarly-worded passage set within the deixis of Ammu's dream, initially suggesting this passage is also focalized from Ammu's perspective. The cited paragraph, however, also opens by telling us that "Velutha watched his lover dress" (321), which is significant because Velutha is specifically predicated as a watcher *only* five times in the novel, and even then only after the novel's half-way point. This paucity is surprising, considering Velutha grew up with Ammu, shared with her a friendship stunted by caste restriction, shared with her children a deeper friendship licensed by official initiatives to relax caste prejudices, and ran the Ipe's family business (where such initiatives stirred unquiet bitterness). Given Velutha's prominence, deictically denying him an agentive gaze for over half the novel bespeaks the early state of the narrator's constricted diegesis, providing a vivid point of contrast for the narrator's emergent theosis.

Every invocation of "blue church sky" can be traced to a different *origo*, to a different "watcher," and the final invocation of the leitmotif cleverly conjoins its associations with the narrator's transfigured ability to see Velutha seeing. Briefly tracing the increasingly positive connotations of Velutha's designation as a watcher should help clarify my point. While *en route* to Comrade Pillai, from whom he

seeks counsel, Velutha has a disembodied experience during which he "looked down and watched a young man's body walk through the darkness . . . " (270). This moment of transcendent deixis signals an emerging hypostatic concord with the narrator as Velutha watches himself from the vantage similar to a narrator's, even describing himself as a character. Velutha's arrival at Pillai's home is initially narrated from Pillai's vantage (270), but as soon as Pillai spurns Velutha's appeals for advocacy, the narrative vantage shifts to Velutha's deixis. Velutha "watched" Pillai "fade from the door" (271) as Pillai, retreating into his house, blurted political slogans in a "disembodied, piping voice" (that is, "disembodied" from Velutha's vantage).[126] Whereas the narrator, until now, rarely "saw" Velutha outside the explicit or implied deixes of the Ipe family, the narrator's theosis, the narrator's hypostatically transfigured diegesis, can now be "authorized" through Velutha's *origo*. Again, this theosis is evinced in the story of the narrator's shifting deictics, not in the chronological unfolding of narrative events. For example, we encounter the third instance of Velutha "watching" near the novel's conclusion, during a scene set chronologically *earlier* than the first two instances. And in contrast to the previous instances, where anxiety attended Velutha's watching, the transfigured narrator introduces more positive connotations to Velutha's gaze: as Ammu slowly approached him before their first liaison, Velutha "watched her. He took his time" (315). The final instance of Velutha "watching" distinctly enjoys the most positive connotations, in significant part because of its association with "blue church sky." The cited passage opens with Velutha watching Ammu dress, which prompts us to assume the subsequent sentences are also focalized from Velutha's vantage. On the other hand, this scene's repetition of "burnished chocolate ridges" and "flat chalk on a blackboard", along with its use of "gooseflesh" alluding to the "goosebumps" reconjure images from Ammu's dream and, therefore, ambiguate the scene's deictic focalization. The narrator offers no clarification: the narrator's disciplined use of the passive voice, along with stripped-down deictics, makes it nearly impossible to focalize narration from one of these characters' loci: in this passage, a sentence like, "He took her face in his hands and drew it towards him," (321) could be imagined from either Velutha's or Ammu's vantage. The scene is presented with a deictic equality, a

radical, hypostatic reciprocity between watcher and watched that entwines but does not efface the deictic divergences that previously marked invocations of "blue church sky."

4. Culmination and Conclusion: The Inheritance of Ambiguity and the Theosis in Narrative Ambiguation

As tricksters, Pappachi and his lineage are proctors of post-colonial identifications that, paradoxically, cannot contain their identities as "border crossers." In terms of the novel's chronological narrative, the sanctification of these characters involves impoverishing them of the powers they commanded abusively. Although the Gospels frequently use tropes of enrichment to signal empowerment, for some the route to redemption required swearing off entitlement. The last shall be first because that's what *they* need for their salvation; the first shall be last because that's what *they* need for their salvation. An empire's salvation lies in its dispossession, because sometimes healing hurts. So, too, for the current batch of tricksters in question: their debasement is a mercy safeguarding them from debasing others as they once could. Within a broad spectrum of Orthodox thought, purification and catharsis are posited as early, necessary steps before venturing theosis (G. Hill 145). Besides, if we identify the humbling humiliations of these tricksters as necessary steps in an on-going process of sanctification—one that continues beyond the novel's conclusions—then our laughter at each character's demise need not indulge in spiteful ridicule. We can, instead, recognize tricks of sanctification at play in the ridiculous belittlements of these characters. We can laugh not with vitriol, but with a measure of hope as we witness these tricksters out-tricked by the slick deixis of narrative theosis. Such hope would be much harder to muster had these characters retained their seats of power. Demise need not suggest damnation: the novel's conclusions leave these tricksters in midst of their redemptive declension, falling like small seeds *en route* to fruition (John 12:24), albeit with the grace of a big house falling on Buster Keaton in *Steamboat Bill, Jr*.

As Roy's narrator has told us, the depth of Pappachi's desire to name and to categorize proves traumatizing when the moth Pappachi discovers is not named after him. Velutha, in contrast, was given

his name (which means white in Malayalam) "because he was so black" (70) and we are given no further exposition justifying his paradoxical naming. The narrator's deictic shifts in presenting Pappachi, however, gradually validate Velutha's antinomy while skewering Pappachi's gravely mistaken search for personhood within the metonymic, classificatory regimes of colonialism. Like most characters in the novel, Pappachi never appears in the novel's narrative present: we learn about him mostly through other characters' recollections, intimately integrated with the narrator's expositions. This integration frequently elides distinctions between a character's deixis and the persona of the narrator. Although third-person narrators commonly affect similar elision by intermingling expositions posited from their locus alongside narration focalized from a character's *origo*, the deictic shiftiness of Roy's narrator gobbets spaces for paradoxes of narrative theosis.

In this respect, consider the elision at work in the narration of Pappachi's violently dichotomous public and private personae:

> In her growing years, Ammu had watched her father weave his hideous web. He was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white. He donated money to orphanages and leprosy clinics. He worked hard on his public profile as a sophisticated, generous, moral man. But alone with his wife and children he turned into a monstrous, suspicious bully, with a streak of vicious cunning. They were beaten, humiliated and then made to suffer the envy of friends and relations for having such a wonderful husband and father. (171)

The paragraph's opening sentence begins explicitly from Ammu's vantage (she "watched") before quickly aligning this deixis with a metaphor and exposition/judgement ("his hideous web") presented from a less certain deictic vantage, in language with little semblance to Ammu's dialogue or internal monologue, yet by literary convention portending to convey Ammu's experience faithfully. Slickly manipulating deictic elisions seeds this passage with premonitions of narrative theosis that swell as the novel develops. The importance and evidence of this narrative theosis resides in the nudging, inchoate transfiguration of Pappachi from a duplicitous Macaulayist trickster capable of damaging cruelty to a

character we can approach, by the novel's conclusion, as more than just a "monster." Pappachi remains far from cleanly redeemed; at best, he elicits a needling, difficult-to-name species of pathos—something like pity too laced with shame to be comfortably patronizing, and too spiked with anger to sustain sympathy or empathy. This mongrel pathos, nevertheless, invites us to consider Pappachi as damaged as he is damaging. As many who have been raised in similarly abusive environments can attest, even the possibility of thinking about one's abuser and feeling something beyond visceral bitterness can represent a small (but potentially transformative) miracle.

Most of the fifty-four references to Pappachi (as a proper noun) in *The God of Small Things* are concentrated in the first half of the novel. Of these fifty-four references, Pappachi is presented as a possessive noun ("Pappachi's…") over twenty times, and with increasing frequency as the novel proceeds: seven of the final references to Pappachi present him as a possessive noun. Because possessive nouns technically act as adjectives (qualifying the noun being possessed), the repeated deictic indexing of Pappachi as a possessive noun conflates Pappachi (the possessing subject) with the objects he possesses, thereby steadily dispossessing him of his personhood as his deictic signification increasingly depends on signifying the target of his grammatical "possession." In other words, as the novel progresses, Pappachi is more frequently narrated as an adjective than as a noun. Pappachi, remember, was fixated on adjectives: as per conventions of entomological nomenclature, if the moth Pappachi discovered had been named after him, Pappachi's name would have functioned as an adjective (for example, in "the Heart and Dart moth," "Heart and Dart" qualifies the "moth" in question). Pappachi is increasingly narrativized as the literal, linguistic embodiment of his traumatically unrealized desire to have been an adjective.

Here we have gallows humour of the grammatical variety. Because persons are nouns, Pappachi's deictic devolution into an adjective bespeaks the indignations and idiocy of believing personhood, in its most empowered actualization, demands commanding the power connoted by conventions of colonial nomenclature. Even when Pappachi is presented as a possessive noun, the narrator frequently uses this grammatical form to signal associations difficult to describe as ownership, thereby further emphasising Pappachi's redemptive dispossession. For example, neither "Pappachi's funeral" (49) nor "Pappachi's

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death" (49) suggests a relationship premised on possession. Perhaps more ambiguous still are allusions to "Pappachi's moth" (277) or "Pappachi's Moth" (69) which simultaneously signal Pappachi's achievement (as in, the moth he actually found) alongside the traumatizing, incomplete actualization of that achievement (as in, the moth he was denied due credit for finding). Rahel's grandfather exemplifies how colonial models of identification/classification can prove severely disturbing for those they wrest to embed, as Rosalind O'Hanlon notes:

> …we have not only the approved selves which the colonizer attempts to produce for the native and to constitute as the sole area of legitimate public reality, but the continual struggle of the colonized to resolve the paradoxes which this displacement and dehumanization…sets up in his [sic] daily existence.(89)

Pappachi represents the violent consequences of a traumatized colonial consciousness, wrenched by desires for whiteness, rattled by its unattainability. He is a grotesquely impressive caricature of British Imperialism in India, mimicking the gaudy pageantry of imperialist beneficence, the ferocity of imperialist abuse, and the absurdity attending imperialist expectations of gratitude.

To appreciate this troubled figure's role in evoking the narrator's theosis, let us return to the allusion of Pappachi's moth and consider how it spirits one of the novel's most prescient ironies, witnessed only within the purview of the narrator's "omniscient" diegesis. When Rahel and Estha, as children, dislodge a weathered boat they will use to visit Velutha,

> [a] white boat-spider floated up with the river in the boat, struggled briefly and drowned. Her white egg sac ruptured prematurely, and a hundred baby spiders (too light to drown, too small to Swim), stippled the smooth surface of the green water, before being swept out to sea. To Madagascar, to start a new phylum of Malayali Swimming Spiders. (195)

Before Pappachi's nixed right to name a moth species would trigger, within the novel's chronological narration, colonial pathologies and cause proportionately absurd suffering, an accident not witnessed by any of the novel's characters would start an entirely new phylum. Entomologically speaking, "starting a new phylum" radically reorders taxonomic hierarchies and tests the very logic of their constitution in a

manner that "discovering" a species cannot. A phylum signals a taxonomically higher (or "bigger") stratum of metonymic nomination. Because species are always classified under phyla, discovering a species that fits within a recognized phylum proves far less disruptive to reigning taxonomic logic than the possibility of engendering a new phylum altogether. In *The God of Small Things*, the paradoxes attending Velutha's name better resonate with the narrated unpredictability and the narrator's upending of nomination—small species, big phylum—than do Pappachi's desires to command the slings and arrows of outrageous categorization.

The story of the spider occurs not long after Pappachi's final appearance as a narrative agent in *The God of Small Things*: here, he is not described as a patriarchal monster but as a child, one who would share a deictic locus with his future grandchildren—sympathetic figures—as he looks at the *same* fallen tree Rahel and Estha would look at. These deictic tricks are not the only deictic tricks that "soften" Pappachi's figuration: the narrator makes use of an omniscient vantage to similar ends, telling a parallel spider story that is deictically imperceptible to characters, yet intimately intertwined with their stories: the world of "Big Things" (the omniscient perspective of the narrator) is hypostatically bound with the narrative world of "Small Things," literally, in that the spider story conveys small details only the narrator could know, and metaphorically, in that these details only accrue narrative value—particularly in helping us recognize Velutha—when considered alongside the deictic diversity of novel's narrative streams. Pappachi's enmeshment in this deictic web may not *prove* Velutha is alive, but it does evince a transfiguration of the narrator's posture towards Pappachi—a transfiguration not explicitly merited by Pappachi's actions but catalyzed by Pappachi's deictic, unexpected and Christologically paradoxical associations with Velutha's figuration. A central tenet of theosis that traces back to Maximus the Confessor contends that "the unity within the self that has attained Christ's likeness ground the perception of others as one and alike. That is, one who has Christ within also sees Christ in everyone" (Harrison 254). The narrator, upon "seeing" Pappachi using kin deictics anchored to Velutha's *origo*, "sees" Velutha.

Consider: it's not only the imagery used in the third-person spider story but also the cadence with which that imagery is delivered that whispers insinuations of Velutha's resurrection, gently evinced by its willowy affect in the narrator's theotic consciousness. Like Mammachi's banana jam, which was declared "illegal" due to its "ambiguous, unclassifiable consistency"—"[t]oo thin for jelly and too thick for jam" (Roy 30)—the spider survivors are described in grammatically parallel cadence ("too light to drown, too small to Swim"). Unlike Mammachi's jam, rendered liminal by the absurd artifice of imposed classification, the spiders engender a more organically transfigurative transgression: whereas the two "toos" associated with Mammachi's jam signal an ambiguity that overwhelms classificatory regimes, the two "toos" associated with the spider survivors compliment-and-emphasize the power of the small to transgress borders *because* they are small. Second, whereas conventional diegetic exposition risks problematically distancing readers from Velutha, a theosis-oriented exposition engages Velutha via the hypostatic convergence of deixes associated with various characters and the narrator's persona. The "smooth surface of the green water" on which the infant spiders float (narrated from an omniscient perspective) echoes the description, shared moments earlier, of the fallen "smooth…tree, blackened by the surfeit of green water" (focalized from the perspectives of Pappachi, Rahel, and Estha).

In one of the novel's final scenes, we are told Velutha "floated on his back" (315) (like those infant spiders) while approaching Ammu, his skin as "smooth" as the river. Velutha has already been described as The God of Small Things, but chiefly within the deixis of Ammu's dream (therefore only known to Ammu and the narrator). The description of the mother spider's death and the rupture of her egg sac foreshadows the description of Velutha's torture as "[c]racking an egg" (292), focalized within the deixes of the twins, and therefore known only to them and the narrator. More amorphously, the story of the "white" spider "drowning" embays Sophie Mol, the white child who drowned, within converging currents of Velutha's variously narrativized affiliations. In a similarly amorphous manner, Pappachi, whom we were told would "weave his web of cruelty," finds the sting of his spider imagery complicated by its similarity to this white spider and, especially, to a "minute spider," introduced in the novel's final paragraphs, whom Velutha names Chappa Thambrum, or Lord Rubbish (320). Not only does Velutha's

act of naming accomplish[127] what Pappachi, the weaver of webs, could not; the descriptions of Velutha's concerns for Chappa Thambrum, which he shares with Ammu, seem to envision Pappachi with transfiguring compassion:

> They fretted over his frailty. His smallness. The adequacy of his camouflage. His seemingly self-destructive pride. They grew to love his eclectic taste. His shambling dignity. (320)

Like Pappachi, Chappa Thambrum shrouds himself in detritus but doesn't know it, carrying on camouflaged, eclectic in his shambling dignity. As a proxy for Pappachi, Chappa Thambrum's capacity to elicit affection hinges on "his smallness," on being redemptively reduced from his previous figuration as a Macaulayist monster. This transfiguration evades the novel's chronological narrative, but it does quietly surface in other deictic patterns of narration, particularly as those patterns evince the narrator's hypostatic transfiguration, its Christomorphic theosis. And that's no small trick.

The Macaulayists were colonial agents, trickster hermeneuts as paradoxically instrumental in codifying colonial rule as they were in evicting the colonizers who had created them.[128] Their descendants risk inheriting post-colonial subjectivity laced with unresolved liminality, and these risks can be intensified for Thomasine Christians. Like other Indian Christians, Thomasines found themselves embroiled in shifting imperial attitudes towards Christianizing India, attitudes that could be as theologically diverse and divisive as they were politically varied and vacillating. Sharing a religious heritage with their colonizers, far from nurturing meaningful affinity, threatened amplifying ambiguities about Thomasine Macaulayist identifications and allegiances. If containing such threats was tricky for functionaries of a colonial regime bent on disambiguation, those dated tricks offer little utility for their post-colonial descendants in *The God of Small Things*. Like their ancestors, these post-colonial tricksters selectively enjoy the cultural license liminality affords while remaining deadly threatened by the liminality riddling their subjectivity. The sense of volatility haunting these character's identifications seeks fixity in decisive violence, but such fixity proves pyrrhic. The characters who killed Velutha were

confident his death could contain his menacing liminality. But maybe, just maybe, their confidence should be called into question.

The small things in the novel can attest to the text's literary rendering of a narrator on the "road to theosis" (Harakas 36). And if we take the small things seriously, we can recognize *The God of Small Things* as a post-colonial narrative of liberation encoded into the theotic transfiguration of a novelized narrator. Theologically, such transfiguration depends on death's failure to contain Velutha, the trickster Christ. As a literary meditation, *The God of Small Things* does not proffer a strident apologetic for Velutha's resurrection; it merely needles readers with deictically devised doubts, small as pinches of yeast, as to whether Velutha is still dead. The novel does not require confident belief in Velutha's resurrection; but it does petition conceding—even inconclusively, even hesitantly—" . . . maybe." Because the latter nudges tiny doubts to bubble and surface, doubts embodying possibilities small and tricky enough to slink past the hegemons orbiting our horizons of consciousness.

Chapter 5

Does the *Christus Victor* Fear the *Christus Dolor*?

Tackling Theodicy in Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the tricky critique of contemporary trends in Nigerian Christian religiosity

assayed in Chigozie Obioma's novel, *The Fishermen.* Obioma's integration of Christological and trickster

tropes censures popular post-colonial Christian movements, Nigerian and pan-African, that interpret faith

chiefly as a pursuit of power, material and mystical. Although gospels promising prosperity and power

have proven appealing to geographically far-ranging post-colonial survivors of colonial exploitation

(Todd 311–25; Green 357–99; see also A. Anderson, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology" 602), the

Christologies that service these gospels risk incautiously aligning enrichment and empowerment with

providential blessing (Wendland 28; see also Clarke 66). These alignments enfeeble the paradox of the

Christ as an incarnational figure who, beyond denying and defying conventional offices of power,

sometimes identified himself with the disempowered (Matthew 35-40) and salvation with

disempowerment: the first shall be last, and the last shall be first (Matthew 20:16); the "kingdom of God"

will belong to the poor, the weeping, and the reviled (Luke 6:20-22). One might assume that figuring the

Christ as a "suffering servant" would find stalwart solidarity with those who have suffered colonial

servility, but not always so. Granted, African theologies with "liberationist" sympathies made important

inroads into South African movements (Martey 52–55) and shaped the Nigerian-held, 1965 All Africa

Conference of Churches' early post-colonial position on "revolution"—"a movement of liberation of

African peoples from colonial domination and from the enslaving aspects of traditional societies" (in

Martey 8). But African liberation theologies have tended to remain concentrated in francophone Africa

(Martey 69) and, much like their Latin American counterparts, have been significantly eclipsed by

charismatic theologies that have appropriated concerns regarding poverty and precarity central to liberationist thought (Killingray 96; Fredericks 100; see also Galgalo 95).[129]

Although charismatic theologies often lend themselves to deeper, less dismissive engagements with local cosmologies than was permitted by the colonial chauvinism of late Victorian missionaries (Obianyo 151–52; Hargreave 294; Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire" 242; see also Gilley 3; Kalu, "Ethiopianism and the Roots of Modern African Christianity" 577; B. Morris 148), contemporary charismatic theologies commonly commandeer colonial constructions of theodicy and liberation: God sanctions pursuits of power, and his providence materializes "liberation" as inclusion and accession within the ranks of the empowered.[130] Christologically, as this chapter will illustrate, the triumphalism of African charismatic leanings remains comfortably aligned with the emphases on regency and authority in colonial Christologies *and* prominent early post-colonial African Christologies. *The Fishermen* cautions that the tendency for African post-colonial Christologies to efface the suffering, servile side of the Christ paradox remains entrenched in colonial anxieties that can still trigger havoc. While likely counterintuitive in most contexts, imagining salvation as disempowerment can present a particularly pronounced stumbling-block in post-colonial settings, which is why Obioma's literary figuration of the Christ paradox is daring and incisive. Although this chapter addresses a necessarily wide orbit of interdisciplinary concerns, as I will clarify in a moment, the thrust of my discussion anticipates or otherwise attends to Obioma's appropriately scandalous figuration of the Christ myth: invoking Yoruba and Igbo trickster tropes, Obioma dispenses personification of the Christ paradox over contrasting characters—Abulu, the marginalized trickster-prophet bearing curses, and Ikenna, the cursed young scholar born into economic privilege.

Set in the city of Akure, Nigeria, *The Fishermen* details a family's falling apart during the mid-1990s dictatorship of General Sani Abacha, as recalled by the narrator, Benjamin. Benjamin's mostly absent father works in a distant city to fund his family's modestly upper-middle-class lifestyle, a chief marker of which is the school Benjamin and his brothers can afford to attend. Although schooling is

virtually synonymous with Westernization for Benjamin and his family, their deeply held charismatic Christian beliefs rarely genuflect to Western Christian thought. Being educated entails becoming Westernized in a way that practicing charismatic Christianity does not, for reasons I will explore in this chapter. When values promoted by schools and churches do not gel, Benjamin and his brothers must confront the contradictions—if not paradoxes—generated by these competing discursive regimes' promises of power. For Benjamin and his brothers, the pull of school and church is further complicated by the awe of institutional, post-colonial political empowerment and the tenacity of power vested in beliefs of pre-Christian, pre-colonial provenance—including beliefs in prophetic tricksters. This volatile concoction of beliefs steeps ever more deeply into Benjamin's oldest brother, Ikenna, causing him to fear for his life, abuse his brothers, and die in an altercation with Benjamin's second oldest brother, Boja. Driven by guilt and grief, Boja ultimately dies while hiding in the family well. At this juncture, Benjamin's remaining older brother, Obembe, attempts to reconcile paradoxes troubling their beliefs and, with Benjamin's help, murders the local trickster-prophet, Abulu. Obembe flees; Benjamin is jailed. Although the novel concludes with Benjamin's release and return home, Obioma refuses to present this restoration of family in conventionally Romantic terms. On the one hand, Benjamin evinces an understanding of empowerment that modestly but meaningfully wrestles with the paradoxical notions of power embedded in classical Christological formulations. Framed within the moral logic of the novel, this germinating understanding holds tremendous promise. On the other hand, Benjamin never expresses remorse, which is as deeply troubling as it is revealing: Benjamin's sanctification remains promising but frighteningly incomplete, as do many post-colonial aspirations.

My exploration of *The Fishermen* opens by outlining the core Christological paradox with which the novel wrestles: the Christ as both conqueror and conquered. My discussion of this paradox and its bearing on the novel's post-colonial trickster Christology develops over the course of this chapter as I consider two expository pressures, literary and historical, that suffuse the novel with an ambience of numinous indeterminacy amenable to tricksters and paradoxes. The first expository pressure is the ambiguous subject position of the novel's first-person narrator, impugning the otherwise realist tone of

the novel's narration. The second expository pressure emerges from the African hermeneutic leanings through which the novel's key Biblical allusions transgress "familiar" interpretations, not only within Western traditions, but also within the novel's local Christian milieu. While discussing how these expository pressures engineer paradoxes, I begin fleshing out *The Fishermen*'s critique of Nigerian Christologies, which oftentimes advance constricted view of the Christ chiefly as a conqueror effaced of his complicating paradoxes. Predilections to such effacement, which are hardly unique to Nigerian Christology, soften the paradoxes at the heart of the Christ myth, reducing it to a totem of Manichean of power principally serving, but rarely questioning, human ambitions. Otherwise put, the question that stirs Obioma's characters isn't, "What would Jesus do?"—it's, "What will Jesus do for me?"

2. Expository Strategies Engaging Paradoxes of the Conquering and Conquered Christ

   2.1. The Trickster Paradoxes of the Christological Conquest

       In *The Fishermen*, the ethical fallout from the failure to foregrounds and confront the paradoxes of the Christ myth vividly evinces the challenges tethering much contemporary, post-colonial African Christian practice to its colonial past. Such constructs of empowerment, which brace *The Fishermen*'s problematization of the post-colonial sacred, are countermined by Obioma's trickster personification of the Christ myth, hypostatically dispersed across two characters whose connectedness culminates in each unwittingly inciting designs for the other's unjust death. Abulu's and Ikenna's braided fates trouble colonial and post-colonial theodicy, for in each character's passion, sublimated Christological paradoxes of suffering surface. According to Nigerian theologian Victor Ezigbo, the most trenchant problem facing contemporary Nigerian Christologies is their skittish soft-pedaling of such paradoxes: the Christ in Nigerian and kin Christologies is predominately presented as the "answer" to achieving one's ambitions and too rarely presented, with necessary paradox, also as someone who risks questioning or unsettling those ambitions (51). As Ezigbo clarifies, Nigerian Christianity is producing at an astonishing speed Christians who construct a Jesus who fits into their "Christological box": a Jesus who can provide what they need and when they need it, but will not critique and inform their understandings of prosperity and

wealth (125). *The Fishermen* tests the risks of Christological paradox, lets the trickster out of its box, and invites fresh, albeit inchoate post-colonial meditations on the Christological confluence of suffering and empowerment.

The central tension in this Christological paradox involves wrestling with theodicy when pairing the Christological significance of the empowered, resurrected Christ (as *Christus Victor*) with the suffering, crucified Christ (as *Christus Dolor)* within African colonial and post-colonial contexts. [131] Although I will substantiate and develop the ideas outlined here over the course of my chapter, modestly introducing these ideas begins clarifying how they inform and complicate my reading of *The Fishermen*. In contemporary North Atlantic contexts, *Christus Victor* evokes Gustav's Aulén's oft-cited 1931 study (titled *Christus Victor*) of ancient and orthodox alternatives to soteriologies of "penal substitution." According to Aulén, *Christus Victor* Christologies and their attendant soteriologies, which locate atonement within emphases on the Christ defeating death on death's own terms, or defeating death from *within* death, held respectable theological currency until largely supplanted in Western Christianity by Anselm of Canterbury's rigorous "forensic" emphases on atonement as penal substitution.

As my chapter will demonstrate, missionaries—English and African—may have subscribed abstractly to soteriologies of penal atonement while, in practice, seeding a problematic version of *Christus Victor* Christology. Missionary Christianity, on the one hand, often violently deprecated pre-colonial African spiritualities while, on the other hand, explicitly appealing to inclinations shared across diverse indigenous African religiosities. Described in Christian terms, these inclinations favoured "practical theology" (Nwachuku 523) and "realized eschatology" (Kügler 261) less preoccupied with redemption of a "soul" and more motivated towards materializing or otherwise actualizing salvific power.[132] Similarly, missionary conflations of "Christianity, commerce and civilization" (Barnett 67; see also Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 284–86) had a decidedly "this-worldly" soteriological slant, conflating salvation with Westernization and, therefore, conflating the conquering power of *Christus Victor* with the conquering power of imperialists bearing his banner. The *Christus Victor* of colonial Christianity suffered a deep

estrangement from its *Christus Dolor* paradox—an estrangement reproduced in African Christian anti-colonial and post-colonial Christologies. *The Fishermen* explores the consequences of this estrangement, reclaims the *Christus Dolor* within its literary figuration of the trickster Christ paradox, and proffers a literary rendering of Johann Baptist Metz's warning that whoever hears "the message of the resurrection in such a way that the cry of the crucified has become inaudible in it, hears not the gospel but rather a myth of victory" (Metz 158; see also Phiri 117).

   In the fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa posited one of the oldest known pairings of Christological suffering with trickster imagery. Apt for Obioma's novel, Nyssa contended that, "Deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, that so, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh, and thus life being introduced into the household of death" (Gregory of Nyssa 678; see also Grau, *Of Divine Economy* 159). Gregory's "fishing" metaphor identifies cunning in the cruelty of the crucifixion, a trickster paradox Wesley Hill contemplates in his contemporary (and beguilingly titled) article, "Easter Fool's Day." The "real divine 'prank' is not the Resurrection,' Hill contends; rather, it is "the scandal of the cross" (W. Hill). That scandal is where Paul celebrates "the real 'foolishness' of the Christian faith"—not in proclamation of the resurrection, but in the "proclamation of Christ *crucified*" (1 Corinthians 1:22-23 NSRV, emphasis added by Hill). The resurrected Jesus first reveals himself to Paul using staple signifiers of astral authority—radiant light, a thundering voice—but he identifies himself paradoxically as one who is persecuted (Acts 9:4). "To this day," posits Hill, "I suspect most of us find it easier to believe God could show up in the miracle of a resurrected body than in the senseless murder of a good man" (W. Hill). Hill confesses that it would be difficult to convince him how "God was 'hiddenly' at work" when illness bogged his ambitions, or at the moment he learned "a beloved colleague was given six weeks to live," but he stresses that such moments point to a core Christological "joke": "that God was there at the 'place of the skull'(John 19:17), in the blood and tears of broken humanity" (W. Hill). Hill's perspective has thick precedent in Christian antiquity, including Leo the Great's "frequent mention of the *gloria crucis Christi*" (Vermeulen 117) paradox (terminology I find helpful in identifying the withered paradox in singularly triumphalist African *Christus Victor*

Christologies). The "glory" of the crucified Christ is a core Christological paradox confronting expositions of faith in *The Fishermen*: what can faith found in the foolishness of the "senseless murder of a good man" offer communities fitfully defying the murderous senselessness of colonialism?

2.2 Narrative Tense and Messy, Necessary Indeterminacy

Early into *The Fishermen*, Benjamin notes that he was close to 10-years-old at the time of his story, but he provides scarce clues regarding where he is or how old he is *now*, in his narrative present. Benjamin rarely addresses his readers from his narrative present: he discloses he is inclined to revisit his memories "now that I have sons of my own" (14), that the events he narrates took place "two decades" ago (61), and that he sometimes wrestles with the formation of particular memories (93, 123, 115, 161). Sparingly using terms such as "I remember," which would explicitly situate readers in his narrative present, Benjamin more commonly narrates, "I remembered"[133] (as in, he is remembering a memory he had as a child) or similarly embeds memories of memories (167, 175) within the novel's broader, mnemonic narrative framework. The dominant past tense of Benjamin's narrative locks readers in suspenseful conjecture regarding how Benjamin's experiences have filtered and fashioned his recollections: because Benjamin's "now" remains a mystery, our cryptic distance from the locus of Benjamin's narrative perspective bedevils our ability to recognize consistently the positivist authority of Benjamin's recollected narration. Similarly, on rare occasions when Benjamin interjects expositions of his recollections from his narrative present—as in, "I have *now* come to know that what one believes often becomes permanent, and what becomes permanent can be indestructible" (198, emphasis mine)—the narrative gap between the novel's conclusion and the narrator's "now" highlights the unknowns equivocating our engagement with Benjamin's expository insights. In particular, Benjamin toys with readers hermeneutic trust when sometimes slyly assuming the persona of a third-person narrator to convey critical details about Abulu—details that Benjamin, as a ten-year old, could only have had as second-hand knowledge, at best (90).[134] Almost everything readers know about Abulu is circumscribed

with prickly uncertainty, as befits a trickster. Much like ten-year-old Benjamin himself, readers must traverse a narrative landscape riddled with misgivings, secrets, suspicions, and suspect authority.

Far from undermining the affect of Benjamin's story, these ambiguities suffuse his narrative with a tense, haunting precarity that accents the paradoxes in his tale of his fratricide and blood vengeance. Benjamin's oldest brother, Ikenna, was stabbed by Boja, Benjamin's second-oldest brother, who then committed suicide, drowning himself in the family well, undiscovered for four days (163). We do not know if Boja killed his brother in malice or in self-defence; nor do we know if he took his own life because he was consumed by the guilt of his criminality or by the trauma of his fatally necessary defense (162). We know a steady acrimony between Ikenna and his brothers started fermenting after a run-in with Abulu, during which Abulu uttered a vision of Ikenna's death (82–85). Against all efforts to counter his increasingly hostile suspicions, Ikenna interpreted Abulu's vision as foreseeing Ikenna's death at the hands of one of his brothers. Whether Ikenna's fears fueled a self-fulfilling prophecy or Abulu was an actual oracle—or *both*—the absence of clear culpability in the deaths of Ikenna and Boja haunt Benjamin, his parents, and his third older brother, Obembe. Possessed by grief, by desperate senselessness seeking sense, and by unfocused rage seeking release, all four figures come me to believe Abulu is responsible for the deaths of Ikenna and Boju. Benjamin's otherwise devoutly Christian mother openly casts a curse on Abulu (203); Benjamin's otherwise "rational" father secretly tries and fails to assault Abulu (229–30). Shaken by their pain and sinister contradictions punctuating their parents' grief, Obembe and Benjamin take matters into their own hands: selectively appealing to tropes of anti-colonial violence in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (195, 197), alongside tropes of expiatory or Biblical violence (198, 207), the brothers kill Abulu methodically and gruesomely, slashing him repeatedly with fish hooks. Obembe flees, but Benjamin, caught and convicted for murder, serves six years in jail. Concentrated in the novel's conclusion, Benjamin's recollections and meditations on his time in prison are strikingly brief, as are the observations he shares from the perspective of his sixteen-year-old self, recently freed from prison. The novel does not conclude by returning readers to Benjamin's narrative present, nor does it offer clues as to how Benjamin has confronted the violence in which he was environed, or processed the trauma of being

imprisoned while entering pubescence, estranged from family. In fact, *The Fishermen* concludes with

Benjamin recalling the memory of his trial from the perspective of his freed, sixteen-year-old self (294),

once again layering readers in a memory of a memory, keeping us well distanced from the exegetic key of

Benjamin's present whence.

On the one hand, Benjamin's story invites much expository hesitation: how are we to engage a

narrative about a repeatedly distressed, murderous child when so many unknowns cloud the story of that

child's transformation into the novel's narrator? On the other hand, the murky borders of Benjamin's

"horizon of consciousness," obscured by swarms of trauma, painfully but compellingly befit Benjamin to

address violent, post-colonial repercussions of colonial tribulation. Furthermore, envisioning Benjamin's

story through the prism of the Christian and trickster paradoxes he conjures reveals a deeply cutting

critique of post-colonial Christian collusions with colonial notions of power—a critique presented

presciently by one whose consciousness has been tragically entangled within the matrix of these

collusions. As posited by Rowan Williams, head of the Anglican Church when the "statistically typical

Anglican" was a twenty-six year old African mother of four (see Knippers):

> Jesus is God's 'revelation' in a decisive sense not because he makes a dimly apprehended God
>
> clear to us, but because he challenges and queries an unusually clear sense of God…; not because
>
> he makes things plainer—on the "veil-lifting" model of revelation—but because he makes things
>
> darker. (Williams 138; quoted in Ezigbo 191)

Veiled in Benjamin's narrative, the Christ myth traffics in a similarly paradoxical darkness: plying

questions, disrupting assumptions, and ultimately frustrating confident *Christus Victor* Christologies.

2.3 Native Agency and African Biblical Hermeneutics

The Fishermen's invocation of key Biblical allusions, while not obviously paradoxical within

North Atlantic hermeneutic horizons, foments salient paradoxes within a rubric of African Christian

hermeneutics. My discussion of how African Christian hermeneutics stoke the novel's paradoxes, and

therefore assert their expository pressure, requires a slightly thicker historical contextualization than did

my discussion regarding the expository uncertainty circumscribing Benjamin's subject position. Because African Christian hermeneutics represented a critical site of anti-colonial contention that resonates into much African post-colonial Christian praxis, the expository significance of *The Fishermen*'s African-inflected Biblical allusions will take a little more time to flesh out.

While acknowledging the ancient, enduring traditions of Coptic and Ethiopian Christianity, as well as the post-colonial study of African influences on early Christianity (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 5–7; Oladipo 325), the model of African Christian practice in *The Fishermen* is rooted chiefly in the history of nineteenth century British Christian incursions and their later, post-colonial repercussions. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, British hegemony in Africa was largely missionary-free (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 72). At that time, Britain controlled more West African slave-trading ports than its imperialist competitors (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 175), and there was little incentive to missionize those whom one's countrymen had forcibly converted into human merchandise. Unlike the entrenchment and expansion of seventeenth century settler or plantation colonialism in North America and the Caribbean, or the aggressive swelling of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century colonial hegemony in South Asia, British colonial encroachment into Africa excited metropolitan military and merchant interests chiefly towards the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although most major English missionary societies successfully advocated for abolition during the early nineteenth century, few commissioned many missionaries to Africa or won many African converts (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 243, 246, 351; Gray, "Christianity" 144; Maxwell, "Post-Colonial Christianity in Africa" 909). Nevertheless, the impact of these early British missionaries strikingly belies their numbers, for they participated in and provoked lasting models of African Christianization that would paradoxically service and frustrate the course of later, increasingly explicit imperialist missionizing.

To help sharpen our primary focus on the Christological trickster in the Nigerian setting of *The Fishermen*, however, a short but critical caveat is warranted. As British missionary initiatives aimed at Africa gained momentum over the nineteenth century, strategies and styles of "Christianization" could differ significantly. Many factors influenced such variation, including regional colonial ambitions,

Africans' responses to those ambitions, and the role missionaries played as functionaries of those ambitions or, less commonly, those responses (Maxwell, "Post-Colonial Christianity in Africa" 404; B. Morris 148; K. Ward, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Missions." 79; Kaplan 11; Oladipo 326; Orobator 77; Ezigbo 8; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 292–93, 432, 588). Obioma's critique of trends in Nigerian Christianity resonates with kindred trends across Britain's former African colonies, but his novel avoids assuming a "transcendent" Pan-African posture that would risk diminishing the regional diversity of colonial and post-colonial African Christian praxis, as some attempts at a Pan-African Christology have been accused of doing (Moloney 515; Orobator 77, 81). Similarly, while this chapter chiefly contextualizes a particular West African Christology to assist my literary exposition of *The Fishermen*, that exposition also gingerly identifies kindred East African and South African Christological inclinations when appropriately illustrative. Nigerian Christianity can by no means alone typify African Christianity, but neither can typologies of Nigerian Christianity be addressed exclusively outside the historical network of geographically disparate yet theologically familiar trends that have oriented them.

The richness and complexity of the Christian milieu in *The Fishermen* can be significantly attributed to an early to mid-nineteenth century West African impetus for "native agency" in Christian practice and church governance. First, the high death toll from Malaria among English missionaries made native agency a practical necessity (Nwauwa 348; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 247). This necessity was complemented by explicit advocacy for native agency from prominent schools of British metropolitan missionary thought (Komolafe 59; Taiwo 106; Stanley 453; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 247, 251, 295). It was also emboldened by competition from diasporic African missionaries—American, Caribbean, Nova Scotian—whose faith embodied native agency (Oladipo 326; Gray, "Christianity" 149; Taiwo 88; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 242; Kalu, "Ethiopianism and the Roots of Modern African Christianity" 581; Kalu, "Missionaries, Christian, Africa" 784; Killingray 94). Perhaps most significantly, expectations of native agency could be traced within Africanized patterns of Christianization, lay and institutional. David Maxwell emphasizes that the efforts of "non-Western" Christians—who even as late as 1899 constituted 84% of the Church Missionary Society (or CMS) workforce (Cox, *The British*

Missionary Enterprise Since 1700 270)—cannot be casually stricken from history: the "real agents of Africa's Christianization," contends Maxwell, "were Africans themselves: the evangelists, catechists, labour migrants, teachers, and Bible women" ("The Missionary Movement in African and World History: Mission Sources and Religious Encounter" 509). Institutionally, native agency had also asserted itself in the successes of African Christian leaders. Methodist ministers J.A. Solomon, E.J. Fynn, T.E. Williams, F. France, John Plange and Superintendent T.J. Marshall spent thirty years establishing Methodism along the Dahomian coast (Coppin 34; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 449). Samuel Adjai Crowther had been an active missionary for the Anglican-affiliated CMS since 1841(Nwauwa 348) until, as worded in William Canton's 1910 *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, "in 1864 the slave-boy Adjai was consecrated in Canterbury Cathedral first Bishop of Western Equatorial Africa" (120).

A lasting significance of these early campaigns for native agency, to which *The Fishermen* attests, is that they contested configurations of power and personhood—central Christological motifs—as those motifs increasingly became associated with whiteness within wider imperialist discourses (Porter, "Missions and Empire, c. 1873-1914" 572; Anderson and Tang 108; A. Roberts, "Introduction" 23). As Obgu Kalu clarifies:

> Colonialism was not just an administrative structure but also a psychological instrument that humiliated and wounded the soul and embedded a certain dependency as the victims internalized the values of the master figure. In church historiography, agency is a tool for analyzing both the patterns of insertion of the gospel and the modes of appropriation; or how agents responded in the process of culture-encounter. ("Ethiopianism and the Roots of Modern African Christianity" 580)

Working with Nigerian ethnomusicologist Bode Omojolo's thesis that the "greatest challenge to European power took place, naturally, in the Church, since it was the most important focal point for educated Africans in nineteenth century Nigeria" (Omojola 9–10; see also Taiwo 304), historians of African Christianity have similarly posited that the struggle for "native agency became the instrument…giving voice to the indigenous feeling against Western cultural iconoclasm" (Kalu, "Missionaries, Christian, Africa" 785) and significantly swaying the Africanization of modernity (Taiwo 23).

Given its import, the struggle for native agency not only survived the waning of many early supports; it also survived the replacement of these supports by increasingly repressive metropolitan policies. Regular use of quinine to ward off malaria allowed growing numbers of imperial-minded British missionaries to target Africa (A. Roberts, "The Imperial Mind" 33; Kalu, "Missionaries, Christian, Africa" 787; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 267). "White fears severely throttled the African American missionary impulse" (Kalu, "Ethiopianism and the Roots of Modern African Christianity" 590) as the nineteenth century cross-faded into the 20th (see also K. Ward, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Missions." 77; Gray, "Christianity" 149). Henry Venn, the head of the CMS from 1841 to 1873, along with David Livingstone who was the most recognizable missionary of the London Missionary Society (LMS), were advocates of by-design "self-euthanizing" mission stations intended to be supplanted by African Christian leadership (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 294). Both died in 1873, eleven years before the Berlin Conference of 1884 partitioned Africa, signaling the ascendency of Benjamin Disraeli's "doctrine of New Imperialism" (Bill Ashcroft et al. 42).[135] Differing from sixteenth century colonial expansion in "speed, competition, and instability" (Peters 25), this New Imperialism was driven by a legion of motives inimical to native agency, including placating metropolitan social divisions by promulgating a common colonial "other" (Bill Ashcroft et al. 42), and addressing anxieties raised by nascent Irish and Indian sovereignty movements[136] in the wake of intensifying expansion by Europe's other imperialists.

"With the new imperialist thrust came a new missionary temper," notes Hastings: "This is noticeable in many places, but perhaps nowhere else so emphatically as on the Niger" (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 390–91; see also Porter, "Missions and Empire, c. 1873-1914" 573). In "West Africa the issue of white control [was] epitomized in the bitter controversy over Samuel Crowther," (Gray, "Christianity" 149) who was *"forced into retirement"* (Porter, "An Overview, 1700-1914" 62) and whose diocese was significantly diminished by Revivalist missionaries with New Imperialist leanings, serving a colonial office "for whom a black bishop exercising considerable authority was a complete anachronism" (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 390; see also 391-392). Another African Bishop would not be assigned

to his diocese until 1951. After his death in 1899, Methodist Superintendent T.J. Marshall was replaced

by a white missionary (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 449). Motives for the broad, uneven "retreat from

the 'ideal of the self-governing church' during the last third of the nineteenth century" had madly tangled

roots, cautions Susan Thorne (151), before stressing that this rootedness was nevertheless well-fertilized

by "the larger history of racist thought of which it was a part" (161).[137] While hardly free of Eurocentric

biases towards Africans, the efforts of early to mid-nineteenth century British missionaries nevertheless

remained unencumbered by their eventual successors' need to justify New Imperialist agendas (Hastings,

The Church in Africa 245).

By the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century, metropolitan attempts to stifle African

Christians' native agency stoked the rapid growth of local congregations run by Africans. Often the result

of schisms within "mother churches," these congregations coalesced formally or loosely within African

Independent Church (AIC) and AIC-affiliated movements (Killingray 95–97). By 1921, "these churches

in aggregate constituted the third largest form of Christianity in southern Nigeria" (Kalu, "Ethiopianism

and the Roots of Modern African Christianity" 588); by 2000, they constituted "a major form of

Christianity . . . consisting of thousands of movements all over the sub-Sahara" (Anderson and Tang 107;

see also Kalu, "African Christianity: From the World Wars to Decolonization" 207–08). But even these

dramatic numbers do not account for the scope of influence these congregations exercised upon on

African Christianity. The syncretic, early charismatic, theological, liturgical and hermeneutic leanings of

AIC-oriented churches were bold assertions of native agency, richly texturing African Christian practices

across denominational lines (Hunt et al. 87–89). These assertions of native agency continue to reverberate

in two key ways in which *The Fishermen*'s presentation paradoxes. First, these movements were typically

sparked or led by populist prophets (B. Morris 160; Sundkler and Steed 198; see also Maxwell, "The

Missionary Movement in African and World History: Mission Sources and Religious Encounter" 909;

Kalu, *African Pentecostalism* viii–x) to whom Abulu, the "madman" and "Prophet" (Obioma 20, 94),

cagily alludes. Second, compared to most of their missionary counterparts, these prophets of native

agency sought greater hermeneutic contiguity with the Hebrew Bible (Hastings, *The Church in Africa*

140, 527) in order to "validate" pre-colonial culture and religiosity. The significance of African

hermeneutic priorities colours the Biblical allusions through which *The Fishermen* critiques post-colonial

native agency stunted by Christologically lopsided constructions of empowerment. Much like

attentiveness to Benjamin's mysterious narrative position, attentiveness to these hermeneutic priorities

presents a key expository resource through which the paradoxes of theodicy embedded in the novel's

critique become more conspicuous.

Relative to their metropolitan missionary counterparts, AIC counter-colonial congregations

typically granted the Hebrew Bible greater hermeneutic attention, fueling a long-standing tension between

African Christian and British missionary variations of Christianity. To the befuddlement of missionary

hermeneuts, African Christians defended local religious orientations by applying evangelical Biblical

hermeneutics to the Hebrew Bible (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 272), for the Hebrew Bible's topoi of

nomadic kin affiliations and sacral orality usually resonated more deeply with African sensibilities than

with those of British missionaries (Sundkler 265; Oduyoye 35; Ngada and Mofokeng 27; Holt 55–56). In

contrast to missionary chauvinism towards African cultures, as John Mbiti explains, "we opened the

scriptures in our own languages and saw the Jewish people in the Bible as a mirror in which we viewed

ourselves" (Mbiti, "The Role of the Jewish Bible in African Independent Churches1" 221). Referencing

the Hebrew Bible provided a defense for polygamy (Gaynor 9; Gray, "Christianity" 145), challenging the

way missionaries conflated culture and faith in their dictates about the form and function of families.

Referencing the Hebrew Bible underscored associations of spiritual legitimacy with ancestral authority, a

shared plane of authority across sub-Saharan Africa despite its highly diverse, often regionalized

theorizations (Orobator 81). More heavily than their British Christian counterparts, African Christians

recognized the gravity of ritually invoking the ancestral God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis

50:24; Acts 7:32) or of God's identifying himself to Moses as the god of Moses's "ancestors" (Exodus

3:13; Mbiti, "The Bible in African Culture" 35–36). Recourse to the Hebrew Bible provided discursive

endorsement of orally-mediated power, which again, while varying across Africa, validated a range of

pre-colonial cultural dynamics (Clarke 32,101; see also 130; Maxey 81). Isaac's inability to retract his

orally-granted blessing to Jacob (Genesis 27: 38-39) or the prohibitions encircling the Tetragrammaton (Exodus 6:3) would register differently in African Christian communities, for whom this sacral authority of such orality was more "familiar" than it generally was for Anglo missionaries. Invoking the Hebrew Bible buttressed the spiritual legitimacy of dreams and visionary experiences, long cited as a commonplace cause for conversion (Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 354, 458, 527, 584; Sundkler and Steed 342; Ezigbo 120; Adolphus Ededimma 109; Kalu, *African Pentecostalism* 38, 77).[138] Given, then, the importance of the Hebrew Bible for indigenous resistance to colonizing Christianity, its lineage and continued significance within post-colonial African hermeneutics deserves due attention in expositions of contemporary, religiously-charged African novels.

2.4 From Fishing to Fratricide: Paradoxes and Hermeneutic Lenses

When refracted through African hermeneutic emphases, the account of fratricide in *The Fishermen*, much like the novel's title, signals an antinomy that rattles expositions. Generously laced with Christian references, the novel's portrait of fratricide harkens back to repeated Biblical allusions regarding fraternal strife,[139] the most recognizable being the story of Cain's murder of Abel, to which *The Fishermen* most explicitly alludes. Within my hermeneutic horizon, allusions to Cain and Abel evoke a morality tale about human dysfunction. Cain's response to God regarding Abel's whereabouts—"Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9 NIV)—serves as a directive that unlike Cain, we should strive to be our sibling's keepers. Obioma's allusion, however, is not chiefly about human dysfunction; it's about God's theodicy. Regarding the obligations we owe one another, the Biblical Hebrew words for "keeper" (inflections of *šō·mêr*) are *never* used anywhere else in the Bible to command or illustrate mutual care. People are commanded to "keep" gardens, covenants, and a myriad of rites (as in Genesis 2:15, 17:9, Exodus 31:14; Leviticus 19:37, 22:31, 26:3; Deuteronomy 11:8, 16:12), but the duty of "keeping" *people* belongs exclusively to God, as in, "The LORD is thy keeper" (Psalm 121:5 KJV; see also Psalm 12:7, 34:20; Genesis 28:15, 28:20; I Kings 8:24-25; Numbers 6:24; 2 Samuel 22:24).

Cain's response to God — "Am *I* my brother's keeper?"— suggests a theodical criticism of God: "Being Abel's keeper is *your* job; where were you during the crime?" Cane seems to demand. God's response, "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!" (Genesis 4:10 NIV), strikes me as a lament containing at least a sideways confession of culpability. Similarly, Obioma's allusions to Cain and Able allude to and confront the theodicy that permitted fratricide. As Benjamin recalls, soon after Boja's body has been discovered,

> As I watched [my father], I remembered reading…that most eagles lay two eggs. And the eaglets, once hatched from the eggs, are often killed by the older chicks—especially during times of food shortages in what the book termed "the Cain and Abel syndrome." Despite their might and strength, I'd read, eagles do nothing to stop these fratricides. (167–68)

Recounting the details of "the Cain and Abel syndrome" focuses Benjamin's grief, his questions, and his nascent awareness of theodicy. "Perhaps these killings happen," Benjamin narrates,

> when the eagles are away from the eyrie, or when they travel camel distances to get food for the household . . . they return only to find the eaglets—perhaps two eaglets—dead: one bloodied. . . [the other] bloated and floating on a nearby pool. (168)

Already described as an "eagle" (25), Benjamin's father was a government bank officer who had to live and work in a distant city, and as Obioma has commented, "I think if he never left" Akure then his family would not have suffered as they did (*Chigozie Obioma Interview: Everything We Do Is Preordained*). Otherwise put, judgment is cast on the father's absence more heavily than on the sins of the son, as connoted in Jesus's own Cain-like inversion of Psalm 121 as he was being marched to his crucifixion: "the mountains and hills" (Luke:23:20 NIV) where, in the original psalm "the LORD is thy keeper" (Psalm 121:5 KJV), will collapse and crush the sorrow of those who had once sought to keep God's refuge there. In recasting a tale of fratricide into a meditation on theodicy, *The Fishermen* makes fratricide a Christological issue because Christian tradition, ultimately, concentrates the cruel mystery of God's theodicy within the paradoxes of the Christ's suffering.

Benjamin and his brothers are the young fishermen of the novel's eponymous title. From my North Atlantic station, "fishermen" evokes a solidly New Testament allusion to Jesus's calling his first disciples (Mark 1:7; Matthew 4:19; Luke 5:11) to stop being fishermen and become "fishers of men"—that is, a euphemism for winning new disciples. This call to be "fishers of men" assumes a very different meaning, as Obioma's novel demonstrates, when read through an African Christian hermeneutic heavily invested in the Hebrew Bible, the scriptures of Jesus, from whence the metaphor of "fishing for men" comes. Jesus's metaphor for discipleship intimates God's rage in Jeremiah 6:16 (where he commissions "many fishermen" to fish out the sinful cowering in their crevices so that they may slaughtered) and in Amos 4:2 (where God cautions oppressors that they will be captured and dragged with "fish hooks"). Serviced by these allusions, the call to be "fishers of men" is not a benign call to win new disciples; it's a call to arms, a call to be agents of God's sacred rage.

The paradoxes of enmeshing metaphors of fishing with discipleship confront readers early into *The Fishermen*, long before Abulu prophesizes that Ikenna will be killed by a fisherman—arguably the novel's most explicit associations of fishermen as disciples dispensing discipline. Benjamin and his brothers have been fishing in the Omi-Ala River, stigmatized as a "source of dark rumour" (15), but considered divine before "colonists came from Europe, and introduced the Bible, which then prized Omi-Ala's adherents from it" (14). In the novel's first association of Christian discipleship with duress, Benjamin's city, Akure, becomes almost entirely Christian after missionaries fished Omi-Ala's devotees from their river devotion. The river shrines may be long gone, but the river remains an alleged site of "all sorts of fetish rituals" (14), initially evinced by "corpses, animal carcasses and other ritualistic materials" (14) on the river or its banks. Beyond the grotesque image of fishing in waters carrying corpses and carcasses, which bears its own aesthetic violence, the secrecy surrounding these "fetish rituals" alludes to God's furious commission to fish out the unrepentant from their hiding places (Jeremiah 6:16).

The Christians of Akure indulging in hidden, alternative spiritual commitments are hardly exclusive to Nigerian Christianity in their practice or their pain. Wrought from the desperation of "socioeconomic and cultural distress" (Orobator 79), their "religious double-mindedness" (Udoh 74),

their penchant for "'temporarily' deserting Jesus" to avail "other sources of solution" (Ezigbo 130, 137), are more emphatically described by Desmond Tutu in metaphors of illness: "faith schizophrenia" (in Orobator 79). It is little wonder that so many in Akure displace their anxieties onto the suspiciously syncretic "Celestial Church," housed on the banks of the Oli-Ala, whose followers openly "worshipped water spirits" (16). During Abacha's dictatorship, mutilated human bodies began intermittently bloodying the Omi-Ala,[140] deepening the river's stigma as an "evil place" (15), but Benjamin and his brothers were able to dispel the ominous airs of the setting by tellingly changing the lyrics from a "well-known ditty performed by the adulterous wife of Pastor Ishawuru, the main character of the popular Christian soap in Akure at the time, *The Ultimate Power*" (16). As Benjamin explains, "We replaced her testimony to God's ability to hold up against the power of Satan's temptations with our ability to hold the fish firm once caught":

> Do all you want, fight all you will,
>
> We've caught you, you cannot escape.
>
> . . .
>
> We, the fishermen, have caught you, you can't escape! (16)

Their childhood lyrical trickery paradoxically foregroundss and foreshadows the violence embedded in the imagery of "fishers of men" as disciples of the Christ.

Curiously, when Benjamin's father discovers his sons have been fishing, his initial anger—"I sweat and suffer to send you to school to receive *a Western education* as civilized men, but you chose instead to be fishermen. Fish-a-men!" (31, emphasis in original)—is curbed when he reworks the negative social tenor of "fishermen" into mangled, violent, Biblically-inflected dicta highlighting *and* inciting paradoxes within African hermeneutic leanings. "What I want you to be," he instructs his sons, are "fishers of good dreams, who will not relent until they have caught the biggest catch. I want you to be juggernauts, menacing and unstoppable fishermen" (37). For emphasis, Benjamin's father has his sons repeat they will be "ju-gger-nauts" and "[m]e-*na*-cing" as "[f]ishermen of good things" (37) in English, the "language of Western Education" (38). On the one hand, the threatening imagery of Benjamin's

father's counsel draws attention to the ways in which his hermeneutic context recognizes a paradox that Western readers may miss: how can ruthlessness so crucially characterize discipleship for the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6)? On the other hand, however, the hermeneutic context of this counsel also enfranchises a pursuit of empowerment in which violent paradoxes associated with being "fishers of men" can be problematically replaced with a flat ambition to be "fishers of good things" who "will dip their hands into rivers, seas, oceans of this life and become successful: doctors, pilots, professors, lawyers" (36-37).

Although problematic, Benjamin's father's conflation of education and power under the rubric of his morphed Biblical allusion is understandable. From its earliest quixotic ventures to its latter collusions with New Imperialist designs, English missionary imperialism in Africa was heavily if not principally associated with building schools (Mbiti, "The Bible in African Culture" 30; A. Roberts, "Introduction" 21; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 403; Nwauwa 357–59). "Edicts" by early twentieth century missionaries in eastern Nigeria—"those who hold the school holds the country, holds religion, hold its future" (Jordon 94)—were reflected in the practices of missionaries in western Nigeria who "started schools even before there was any church or mission house" (Abernathy 39; see also Nwauwa 348). In those regions of Africa worked by British missionaries, the words for "Christian" and "reader" were often synonymous (Nwauwa 349; Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 457). "From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand," affirms Achebe's narrator in *Things Fall Apart* (128). Even today, this proximation of piety and pedagogy can be evinced in Ghanaian hymnist Afua Kuma's description of the Christ as a "Pensil" (sic) (Amoah and Oduyoye 42). "The sole purpose of the 'enlightened Jesus's of Missionary Christology, as some Nigerian theologians see it," surmises Ezigbo, "is to teach the 'barbaric' and 'unschooled' the ways of the West" (13). Although approaches to using schools as a principal vehicle of Christianization could vary significantly across colonial Africa, colonial education—synonymous with "Christian education" (Gray, "Christianity" 190)—offered practical access to institutions and knowledge of an ascending, then unapologetically governing, foreign power.[141] Chastised for their bigotry by students who become leaders of Africa's independence movements (Maxwell, "Post-Colonial Christianity

in Africa" 401; see also K. Ward, "Christianity, Colonialism, and Missions." 78), mission schools left a lasting gash on colonized self-understanding, still witnessed in Benjamin's father's astonishment over his sons' fishing: "Just how could kids receiving Western education engage in such barbaric behavior?" (34-35) *The Fishermen* draws on these complexities when leveling its critique of "Christian power" stripped of Christological paradox: education is associated with empowerment promised by Western education, and power is cherished as sacred.[142] Benjamin understandably revels in the possibilities of studying in Toronto "with white people, to get the best Western education Father had always talked about as if it was a *sliver of paradise*" (242, emphasis mine).[143] Pursuing empowerment through education is (generally) honourable, but if such pursuits conflate Christianization with education, and therefore with empowerment, they numb critical paradoxes of theodicy circumscribing the Christ myth.

Despite Jesus's repeated warnings to his disciples that following him would invite persecution and risk execution (Mark 8:34; Matthew 10:22, 16:24, 24:9; Luke 21:16-17), in Nigerian colonial and post-colonial contexts "Christian suffering" has long been uncomfortably incongruous with the promises of Christian discipleship—prosperity, health, and protection from threat (Marshall-Fratani 88; Clarke 82; see also Hastings, *The Church in Africa* 211). In missionary campaigns, as Hastings details,

> Again and again the power of Britain was appealed to as a demonstration of the truth of the Bible. Victoria herself had done nothing less when she wrote to the chiefs of Abeokuta [in southern Nigeria] that the greatness of England depended upon the knowledge of Christ. (*The Church in Africa* 274)

These colonial immixtures of "greatness" with "knowledge of Christ" infected post-colonial African Christology, paradoxically, through strategies of "enculturation" intended to resist colonial hegemony. Within British missionary spheres, enculturation generally refers to processes of translating Christian mythology and practice from its Hellenic, North-Atlantic and British context into meaningfully local languages, custom and cosmologies. As an assertion of native agency, enculturation broadly connotes a laudable goal of decolonizing Christian mythology by reconsidering African cultural and spiritual

dynamics with far more care than missionizing initiatives were typically inclined to exercise (Chitando, *Troubled but Not Destroyed* 13,17). Enculturation, however, is not without its serious risks—especially in wanting to avoid the disruptive potential of a Christ myth that paradoxically enjoins and embodies cosmologically incompatible categories of being and power.

Encultured African Christologies challenged Anglo colonial hegemony, but these challenges often commandeered the logic of missionary Christology and granted the Christ titles associated with African regency or authority (Mligo 362; Manus, *Christ, the African King* 178; Kaur-Mann 31–33). "From the outset of modern African theology," observes Stinton, "Mbiti called attention to African perceptions of Jesus as '*Christus Victor*' above all else" (124; see also Okoye 123). Indeed, Cliffton Clarke's study of Akan Christology posits that *Christus Victor* is not merely one side of many paradoxical titles for the Christ, it is the "generic motif" (90) upon which all other Christological imaginings depend: "As Lord, Saviour, God, Messiah, or Healer, the *conqueror* motif is present within these depictions of Christ" (90). Similarly, Chitando's ironically titled, "Theology from the Underside: a case of African Christian names in Zimbabwe," surveys lay Shona Christian's post-colonial Christological titles, *all* of which are aligned with the *Christus Victor* (27–28). The tendency of enculturated *Christus Victor* Christologies to broadly envisage that over which the Christ has conquered has chequered connotations: on the one hand, this breadth evinces how native agency can more holistically address the material and spiritual exigencies of African Christians; on the other hand, the power of this encultured Christ bears discomfiting semblances to the missionary Christ promising salvation through "Bible and plough" (Ukachukwu 455; G. O. West 138). As Okoye summarizes,

> When Jesus is called 'savior,' the experience of deliverance for many Africans is not primarily from sin; rather, salvation is deliverance from the power of evil principalities of *human enemies*, deliverance from ill health and misfortunes of life as a means to bring wholeness and peace—the complete person saved in unity with God. (123, emphasis mine)

While cultivating orthopraxy serving "the complete person" can be vital, the Christological emphases girding such orthopraxy risks enculturating empowerment at the expense of enculturating paradox. In

post-colonial Nigeria, concurs Ezigbo, Christological paradoxes have been blunted by "the majority of lay Christians [who] see Jesus primarily as solution to their spiritual, economic, and social problems" (Ezigbo 48). Besides christening the Christ with African regal titles while paying little heed to his paradoxically servile designations, distinguished schools of Christological enculturation further attenuated the paradox of the Christ in their ambition to demonstrate the African resonance of the Christ myth *outside* the cultural provenance of colonial missionaries. Invoking tropes of sanctity shared across several African spiritualties,[144] these enculturated Christologies evaded endorsing the paradoxical Christ as a herald of disruption and suffering. After all, disruption and suffering were still vivid markers of colonialism.

Because these enculturated Christologies are principally explications of the Christ's power, as were the Christological formulations favoured by Anglo missionaries, African enculturations of the Christ myth court reproducing imbalanced, colonial Christologies that could justify the violence of colonial conquest (see Carter 189). Even Akan Christologist J.S. Pobee, in advancing chieftain titles for the Christ, cautions "the chief analogy is dangerous because it is a *theologia gloria*e lacking a *theologia crucis*" (Pobee 97; see also Akper 49). As Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye remind us, the "rapid growth of the African charismatic churches that offer a *Christus Victor*" Christology can be traced to missionary Christology emphases on "the Christ enthroned in glory" which "fitted into the colonial ambiance of the propagation of Christianity" (37; see also Rockrohr 7). In *The Fishermen*, therefore, the suffering visited on Benjamin and his family seems like a paradoxical affront to assumptions that the faith of "the fishermen" portends prosperity, or at least offers insurance against misfortune. The novel's title evokes paradox by associating discipleship with disempowerment, and by stressing consequences entangled in casting "fishing" as metaphor for being a disciple of a one-sided, muscular Christ myth disabused of paradox. *The Fishermen*'s exploration of the religiosity Benjamin shares with his brothers gently, even comically, introduces readers to a zeitgeist steeped in this one-sided *Christus Victor* mindset before fleshing out its consequences.

Prayer is first mentioned in of the earliest scenes in *The Fishermen*, during a football match including Benjamin, his brothers and their friends. Before starting their game on the day the group

acquires "a fine new white ball" (10), their friend Kayode prayed, "asking God to help keep this one for much longer by preventing it from crossing" into private property (10). As soon as the game began, Boja kicked the ball into the fenced compound of a doctor, after which Kayode again "knelt and prayed for God's intervention" (10) in retrieving the ball. Not only did they fail to retrieve the ball, the ire of the doctor was severe enough to turn the boys' interests from football to fishing (10). The authority of the doctor trumped the power of the boys' two-prayer petition; unanswered prayer instigated an ill-boding narrative turn. A lost ball and a change of hobbies may not loudly signal theodicy, but as the novel continues to probe and reveal the faith of the boys, the expository weight of the paradoxes embedded in this early episode increases.

Consider: in the wake of their failed appeals to God, the next prayer the boys offer includes threats. When the brothers are caught fishing and realize that their father will severely punish them upon returning to Akara, Obembe and Benjamin make this prayer on the eve of their father's homecoming:

"Lord Jesus, if you say you love us . . . Don't allow father to visit again. Let him stay in Yola, please Jesus. Please listen to me: you know how hard he would whip us? Don't you even know? . . . Listen, Jesus, if you let him come back and he whips us, we won't go to Sunday school again, and we won't sing and clap in church ever again! Amen." (27)

The prayer reveals much in its edgy questioning of Jesus's concern or capacity to intervene. As dutiful Sunday School attendees, the boys *know* that Jesus knew how it felt to be whipped (Mark 27:26, Matthew 15:15, John 19:1); they *know* that Jesus, like them, knew fear on the eve of facing a father's will (Mark 14:36, Matthew 26:39, Luke 22:42). First, the bold prayer questions the humanity of the Christ paradox, channeling trends in Nigerian Christology that according to Ezigbo can skirt with Docetism (42, 170).[145] Second, the prayer also questions if knowledge need be accompanied by any ethical obligations: if the Christ knows about the boys' troubles and still does nothing, why should he be studied and celebrated? The novel tempts us to dismiss the boys' plea (to remain long estranged from their father) as *only* the fleeting, desperate, and naively short-sighted wants of worried children. As we learn, the logic supporting the boys' petition is actually a rough but recognizable approximation of a religious logic that dominates

their environment. Furthermore, when their father does return, the punishment from which the boys prayed to be spared has troubling and long-lasting consequences that evince much prescience in their "childish" petition. Ben recalls how anxieties long festering in Ikenna (which would ultimately mutate into consuming fears of fratricide) were catalyzed by his punishment: "Ikenna turned into a python after the whipping. It changed him. The Ikenna I knew became…a mercurial and hot-tempered person constantly on the prowl" (46). Prayers for Ikenna by his mother and his church (103) go unanswered. Prayers by Pastor Collins to bless the boys on their journey to Canada, to grant the boys "'[their] portion' in Jesus's name" (257), go unanswered.

As zealously illustrated by Boja and Obembe, a common approach to confronting God's unresponsiveness blames shortcomings in a petitioner's faith for impeding God's action. Like Peter who walked on water but started sinking as soon as fear eroded his faith (Matthew 29:31), petitions to the *Christus Victor* must subdue doubt. Boja enacted this reasoning when, flexing the power of his faith, he drank from his family's well after the decomposing body of a large bird had polluted it:

> After the bird was removed from the well, persuaded that if he prayed over it, it could not harm him, Boja announced he would pray over the water and drink it. He put his faith in the scripture passage "Behold, I give unto you power to treat on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (163-164)

Boja did not fall ill. Alluding to how wells in the Bible can symbolize both life and death (Berlin and Brettler 1357), Ben recalls,"Boja conquered the well, but years later, the well conquered him. It killed him" (164). Paradox lurks behind Ben's troubling conflation of faith with conquest and its "kill or be killed" dualism. Ben and Obembe realize that until Boja's body had been found, they had not fallen ill from drinking well water in which Boja's body, much larger and therefore more polluting than a bird's, had been decomposing. If the well waters are deep and fresh enough to remain potable despite hosting decomposing human remains, readers have sound reason to cast damning doubt on providential power having protected Boja when he drank water fouled by a dead fowl. Or, perhaps, Boja's body *had* made the well septic and Ben's family *was* protected, as assured in the verse Ben recalls Boja reciting. Either

way, Boja's bravado and bitter end trouble causal connections between theodicy and the purity or intensity of one's faith. The causticity of these assumed causal connections, however, fatally sustains its grip on Obembe, who in his grief further delineates Boja's equating faith with an exercise of power. In addition, it further delineates the paradoxes that surface when exercising power to sublimate the paradoxes of theodicy.

As Obembe and Ben approach Abulu before one of their failed attempts on his life, they encounter two men, who are holding Bibles and also watching Abulu: "We have been fasting and praying for three weeks now…asking God for power," says one as they consider praying for Abulu's healing, "Isn't it time to use it?" (219) Obembe intercedes quickly, convincing the men to take their power elsewhere. Soon after, he explains to Ben:

> "I was scared those men had some power. You never know: they have fasted for three weeks?
> Phew! What if they had power like Reinhard Bonnke, Kumuyi or Benny Hinn, and they could
> pray and get him healed? I don't want that to happen. If he is well . . .[y]ou what that means don't
> you? That this man will escape, go scot-free after what he did? No, no, I won't let that happen…"
> (219)

Obembe reveals much in worrying that power accrued by three weeks of praying and fasting risks overshadowing the power he had accrued by writing and sketching designs to kill Abulu: "Haven't you hear Pastor Collins say, many times," Obembe asked Ben as they put their plots to kill Abulu on paper, "that whatever happens in the physical world has already happened in the spiritual? . . .So, before we leave this room in search of Abulu, we must first kill him here" (206). This macabre mix of piety and well-planned violence (the boys wanted to avoid unnecessary complications and casualties) fiercely satirizes the living legacy of colonizing Christianity epitomized in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. The final treatise of the Conference endorsed missionizing as an imperial trust (K. Grant 28), even as it attempted to charter the well-planned violation of Africa in a deal designed to mitigate complications and casualties between competing colonial forces. Besides believing *Christus Victor* power remains constrained by the intensity of his faith, Obembe also believes *Christus Victor* power can countenance

violent ambition, as so often seemed axiomatic to Christian imperialists, without accounting to the paradoxical *gloria crucis* antonym from which it has been cleaved.

A terrifying consequence of this cleavage awaits readers as the novel concludes, even after we have witnessed Obembe and Benjamin—children!—killing Abulu. Benjamin is *never* admonished for his crime by anyone he knows. Indeed, during a short reprieve from his trial, Pastor Collins offers Benjamin not just ethical exoneration but outright exaltation:

> "You are and will be a great man." He raised one hand from the wheel. "Even if they end up putting you there—I hope not, and that won't be the case in Jesus's name—"
>
> "Yes, amen," Father interrupted.
>
> "But should that happen, you know there will be nothing greater, nothing grander than that you will be suffering for your brothers. No! There will be nothing greater. Our Lord Jesus says: 'For there's no greater love than for a man to suffer for his friends.'" (277)

Pastor Collins's invocation is dredged in jarring caveats and convolutions. First, Pastor Collins distorts the verse he cites: it does not read "to suffer his friends"; it reads "to *die* for his friends" (John 15:13). Benjamin did not die for his brothers; he killed in their name. Second, Pastor Collins takes marked license when he bluntly contradicts the very verse he cites to authorize his reasoning. Whereas Jesus said, "For there's no greater love than for a man to suffer for his friends," Pastor Collins assures Benjamin that suffering for one's brother is "*even grander*" (emphasis mine). Third, how is Benjamin suffering *for* his brothers? In part, Jesus was referring to the fatal suffering he would endure to secure the atonement of his friends (John 15:13). But Benjamin will not suffer to atone for his brothers: he will suffer because he believed he had avenged them. Pastor Collins's impoverished understanding of *gloria crucis* Christology renders the *Christus Victor* a deity who inspires Pastor Collins to praise Benjamin without remorse or qualification, to endorse tacitly Benjamin's belief that Abulu caused the deaths of his brothers, and therefore to justify Benjamin's violence—along with the suffering it will invite—as honourable.

A week before this exchange with Pastor Collins, Benjamin's father had taken Benjamin aside in court to tell him, secretly, "What you have done is great. *Ge nti, eh*. Do not regret it…" (278). These

sentiments would be easier to forgive as the tragic affects of a father's badly channeled trauma had they not also been echoed by Pastor Collins. Like Pastor Collins's mangled attempt to enculturate the paradoxes of Christological suffering, Benjamin's father's struggling resuscitation of "fishermen" allusions demonstrates how a colonial Gospel of Conquest still commands post-colonial obeisance. Moments before Benjamin takes the stand at his trial, his father gives him this commission:

> "You will go there like the man I've trained you to be. You will go like the man you were when you took up arms to avenge your brothers . . . You will tell them how it all happened, you say it all like the man I brought you up to be—menacing, juggernauts. Like—remember, like—"
>
> He paused, his stray finger on his shaven head, searching his mind for a word that appeared to have fallen to the back of his mind.
>
> "Like the Fishermen you once were," his quivering lips uttered finally. (294)

For Benjamin's father, "fishermen" now designates pride in an identity he wants Benjamin to recover, despite its associations with being denied a hallowed Western education. Akin to Pastor Collins's bastardizing a Biblical reference to instill pride in Benjamin should he suffer "for his brothers," Benjamin's father's allusions to "fishermen" awkwardly leverage an aura of Biblicism to absolve Benjamin of shame. Attempts by Pastor Collins and Benjamin's father to assure Benjamin of his moral vindication evince, perhaps counterintuitively, demonstrate how timid enculturations of *gloria crucis* Christologies enfeeble the *Christus Victor* by coarsely constraining its engagement with complex suffering within tropes of conquest. The final section of this chapter considers how *The Fishermen* revitalizes Christological paradoxes by diachronically turning to the pre-colonial lineages of their contemporary Christian practices. This turning presents a messy, unpredictable but nevertheless instrumental post-colonial resource through which Christological paradoxes are nascently reintroduced into a flattened, colonial Christ myth. This final section explores how *The Fishermen*'s fresh enculturation of the Christ myth culminates in Obioma's use of trickster tropes to revive Christological paradoxes necessary to the novel's narrative meditation on theodicy.

3.   Culmination and Conclusion: Abulu, Ikenna and Egrets

In the main, Ikenna is affiliated with recognizable Christ imagery in *The Fishermen*, as Abulu is with trickster imagery. On several occasions, however, Christ-like connotations colour Abulu's characterization, just as trickster-like connotations colour Ikenna's. Far from being sealed behind two sides of a Manichean divide, their identities bleed into each other, destabilizing Christologies heavily premised on conqueror-conquered axes. My discussion begins by considering the significance of the literary devices and theological allusions used to correlate these characters. I then consider how Abulu fulfills and transgresses his personification as a trickster, before proceeding at greater length to discuss Ikenna's fulfillments and transgressions of identity, and the *Christus Victor-gloria crucis* paradoxes therein.

As a signifier of theodicy, fratricide critically informs the paradoxical narrative kinship between Abulu and Ikenna. Ikenna grows increasingly estranged from his father; Abulu grew up fatherless (88). Ikenna was killed by his younger brother; Abulu killed his older brother (91). Abulu and Ikenna are the inverted Cain and Abel of their respective narratives. Fratricide predicates their narrative kinship, and the theodicy sheathed in this kinship accents other expository paradoxes girding their uncanny "inverted" connectedness. Even prominent differences between Abulu and Ikenna spotlight the shared economy of symbols that, in funding these contrasts, also correlate the building blocks of their characterization. Ikenna attends a "renowned Christian school built and founded on the word of God" (54); Abulu "could not afford a proper education" (88). As Ikenna grows increasingly convinced of Abulu's prophecy, he increasingly resists attending church (100, 110-111); Abulu attempts to attend Ikenna's church, respectfully participates in the services (227-228), but is soon aggressively turned away—"the ushers chased him with sticks whenever he came near the premises" (228)—due to his immodest dress, his penchant for sitting on the "women's row" of church (228) , and the uncomfortable paradoxes of discipleship his presence posed to churchgoers.[146] For Abulu and Ikenna, schools and churches represent institutional missionary legacies whose functions and connotations still remain intermixed, and to which access can still signal post-colonial penury or "progress." An ironic symmetry figures the mirrored mutual

inversions of Abulu and Ikenna: even in delineating shared sites of contrast, these inversions evince a narrative reciprocity mediating the symbols of "otherness" separating them.

This narrative reciprocity accrues heightened expository attention as readers recognize how both Abulu and Ikenna allude to the Yoruba trickster, Èsù-Elegba.[147] Some of Èsù's most recognizable characterizations include his limp (G. Thomas 68), his phallus (M. J. Davis 147) , and his powerful tongue (Garber 121). Like Èsù, Abulu was a straddler of worlds, material and mystical, with "one leg here, one leg there as if were a mediator between the two domains" (94). His "enormous penis" (93) would be "unabashedly" visible when Abulu "in the realm of insanity…went about completely naked" (93). Abulu's "tongue was a scorpion" (95). Ikenna had a limp for life because a scorpion once bit him (148). Ikenna lost a testicle to an early childhood soccer injury and never stopped unabashedly guarding his genitals when playing (227). Abulu's tongue, a "catalogue of catastrophes" (95), prophesied Ikenna's death in accurate detail, but not before Ikenna had unwittingly prophesied Abulu's death in equally graphic detail: upon first encountering Abulu, Ikenna reassures his frightened brothers that, "If he comes any closer, we will tear his flesh with the hooks, just like we kill fish, and throw his body in the river" (82).

Whereas Èsù and Jesus have been notably syncretized in African Caribbean and African American religiosity,[148] the different connotations Èsù carries in Nigerian Christianity make his countenance with Christ figures controversial. Initiated by Crowther's translations of the New Testament (Adogame 1817), translations of the Bible from English to Yoruba and Igbo translate "Satan" as Èsù in Yoruba or Ekwensu in Igbo (Ezigbo 221). For Nigerian Christians, twisting Èsù into the personification of the Anti-Christ first involved stripping Èsù of the offices and semblances he shared with the Christ. The Christ would assume Èsù's power as "an enforcer deity" (Aiyejina 4; consider Matthew 25:31-33, Reveation 19:11), a mediator between God and humanity (Drewal 210; consider Romans 8:34, 1 Timothy 2:5), securing covenants petitioned through blood sacrifice (Pelton 145; consider Matthew 26:28, Hebrews 9:20). Discomfiting semblances between these deities would be downplayed: after all, like the

Christ, Èsù as described by Funso Aiyejina was a "disguise artist" (4; consider Luke 24:13-35), a "mischief maker" (4; consider John 2:7-10), "a rebel" (4; consider Mark 2:23), "a challenger of orthodoxy," (4; consider Matthew 5:38), and "a shape shifter" (4; consider Revelation 5:5 and 12:11).

Compelling theological counters to personifying Èsù as colonial constructs of Satan have long been voiced, but to little effect. As Nigeria approached the cusp of independence, E. Dolaji Idowu attempted to nuance translations of "Èsù," leveraging the significance of the Hebrew Bible in African hermeneutics to argue that Èsù was akin to Job's tormentor (80), a celestial 'special relations officer' (80) licensed by God, much like Èsù had been a minister of Olódùmarè, the supreme Yoruba deity. Idowu's ideas gained little traction across Nigerian Christologies in which the Christ is predominantly a trickster tamer, a restorer of order, not an agent of disruption (despite many Bible passages, cited above, that identify the Christ as a disruptor). Indeed, according to Ezigbo's ethnographic study of contemporary Nigerian Christology, "the majority of Igbo and Yoruba Christians perceive Ekwensu and Èsù "as Satan, "the chief destroyer of human happiness and the antagonist to God" (223). Elements of the "old" Èsù still stir in Nigerian Christian demonology. Chinedu Ihesiaba discusses the devil's "tricks and wiles . . . wiles an tricks" (Ihesiaba 63; see also Balogun 12). But these traits have been subsumed within Èsù's arrogation to God's Other. Satan afflicts Christians with hardships, but he also tricks and tempts Christians by portending "the power to solve problems more quickly than Jesus" (Ezigbo 225). According to Ruth Marshall-Fratani, the appeal of this power carries enough currency to fuel mendacious suspicions: "In Nigeria, power is itself the evidence of strong spiritual connections: . . . 'big men' that have 'eaten well' are" not uncommonly assumed "to have links to secret and occult forms of power" (99).

Confronting readers with kerygmatic Christ who "tricks" by becoming powerless, *The Fishermen* disturbs this patterned characterization of Èsù as God's satanic antagonist who "tricks" by showcasing more power than the Christ. The novel's figuration of Èsù, in which Abulu and Ikenna fatally coalesce, resonates less with Crowther's legacy than it does with Obioma's fellow Nigerian writer, Femi Osofisan. "Eshu is the god of indeterminacy," explains Osofisan, and indeterminacy is necessary: "If a knowledge needs to be carried forward, something must come and disturb the present stability. It is when the present

stability is disturbed that we then move forward again, else we stagnate, and die" (7). Osofisan's sentiments are abutted by Ezigbo who, speaking from his Christocentric theology, cautions Nigerian Christians of their "need to learn from Jesus and work to dismantle and criticize"—that is, disrupt—"all demonic systems that promote the subjugation and oppression of human beings" (221). *The Fishermen* challenges Nigerian readers to look for this resonant Christ paradox—again, scandalously—where many may be unaccustomed or averse to looking: within the "dreaded" (Ezigbo 223) and demonized figuration of a disruptive, limping trickster.

To borrow from Lewis Hyde, Abulu, like Èsù and kin tricksters, was "amoral, not immoral" (10). Benjamin recalls that Abulu's prophecies could be helpful as well as harmful (96), and that Abulu neither made money from his prophesies nor seemed aware of their consequences. Despite the explicitness of his traditional Èsù figuration, Abulu nevertheless remains pocked with Christ imagery. When the boys first spot Abulu they mistake him for dead, but he proves quite alive by performing an acrobatic feat for which the boys "clapped and cheered in admiration" (79). In an inverted allusion to Luke 24:5, the boys thought they were looking at the dead among the living. "He is like a lion!" Benjamin exclaims (80) before continuing to describe Abulu as "*robed* from head to foot in filth" (80, emphasis mine). Perhaps unwittingly, Benjamin recognizes in Abulu what he cannnot recognize in the Christ of his milieu: a contiguity between the "conquering lion" imagery of the *Christus Victor* and the robe imagery it shares to *gloria crucis* Christologies (consider Mark 15: 17, Rev 7:14).

After this first encounter, *The Fishermen*'s relies less on allegory and more on association to present Abulu's association with the Christ myth. Before abetting Obembe in one of his schemes to kill Abulu—this time, by poisoning him—Benjamin's witness to Abulu's privation stirs Christic associations that cloud the clarity of his anger:

> He had no money, no clothes, no parents, no house. He was like the pigeons in the Sunday-school song we sang: "Look at the Pigeons, They Have No Clothes." They have no gardens, yet God watches them. I thought Abulu was like the pigeons, and for this I pitied the madman, as I sometimes found myself doing. (224-225)

Benjamin's association of Abulu with the dispossessed over whom God still watches, an allusion to Matthew 6:26, presents a distressing test of a theodicy confined to *Christus Victor* Christologies. Benjamin nascently realizes his success in fatally poisoning Abulu would showcase God's failure to keep his promises to his pigeons, thereby deferring culpability to God. Abulu, however, survives the poisoning attempt, something the brothers realize when he approaches them

> dancing and singing rhapsodies of a saviour on whose palms nine-inch nails were driven and would someday return to the earth. His psalmody whooped the darkening evening into an esoteric realm as we followed, shocked that he was still alive. (226)

On the heels of Benjamin's comparing Abulu to those who "have no gardens," the latter's explicitly Christian hymn positions him as an Èsù figuration well outside contemporary Nigerian Christian constructions of Èsù as Satan. Recalling the controversy with Abulu's ejection from Benjamin's church alongside these associations, *The Fishermen* presents a post-colonial challenge to reconsider colonial-era strategies of enculturating spiritualities with pre-colonial lineages into contemporary understandings of the Christ paradox.

The Fishermen returns to allegory to finalize Abulu's Christological connections. After killing Abulu, Obembe declares, "It is finished" (251). To emphasize that this repetition of Jesus's final words before dying was not a coincidental turn of phrase, Benjamin recalls: "'It is finished,' a voiced repeated in my ears" (251). Obembe, who had frequently reassured Benjamin that killing Abulu would free them of their grief, affirms "Now we are free" immediately after declaring "It is finished" (251). The boys have displaced onto Abulu's death a lopsided *Christus Victor* Christological theodicy which, stripped of its *gloria crucis* paradox, twists a doctrine of freedom won through another's suffering into a license to inflict suffering on an Other: it is the conquerors who will declare when "it is finished," not the conquered.

My discussion of Ikenna begins by exploring some of his more explicitly connoted associations with an "empowered" *Christus Victor*. Ikenna is the eldest brother in an Igbo family where "Elder Brother" is an enculturated Christological title (Manus, "Methodolocial Approaches in Contemporary

African Biblical Scholarship: The Case of West Africa" 14) with broader West African (Aye-Addo 178) and Pan-African currency (Martey 80). Ikenna first calls his brothers to "follow" (12) him, telling them that he will "make you fishermen" (12)—and the brothers immediately follow as did Jesus's disciples when he called them to be fishers of men (Matthew 4:19-20). Consider the Christological intonations in Ben's description of Ikenna as "our beloved brother, the forerunner who shot into the world ahead of us and opened every door for us. He guided us, protected us with a full-lit torch" (73).[149] Initially serving as a mediator between the worlds of his parents and his brothers—the latter rely on Ikenna "for the interpretation of most things" (4)—Ikenna harkens the Christ's office as the "mediator between God and men" (1 Timothy: 2:5).

As a child, Ikenna bites his father to protect his mother (61), foreshadowing his repeated role as an interventionist savior. In order to save Boja from his father's wrath, Ikenna lies to his father about Boja sabotaging Ikenna's chance to study abroad, claiming equal culpability in the sabotage (126). Despite Ikenna's unconvincing claim that he could not weather being separated from Boja, and that he would wait to study abroad until Boja could join him, Ikenna's father's seething awareness of Boja's sole guilt "was overcome at the time by what Ikenna had deemed an act of love" (126). When Boja reacts angrily to his headmaster's continued mispronunciation of his name (and the predictably ensuing laughter from students), Ikenna vocally defies and threatens his Headmaster to save Boja from reprisal:

> As Boja made to go out to the podium, Ikenna ran forward, stood in from of him and cried out
> aloud, "No, ma, this is unfair! What has he done?" . . .
> The silence that followed these bold words…was for a moment spiritual . . .
> "In fact," Ikenna's voice rose again . . . "this is unfair. We'd rather leave your school than be
> punished unjustly. My brothers and I will leave. Now. There are better schools out there where
> we can get better Western education; Daddy will no longer pay the big money to you." (65-66)

As he leads his brothers out of school, Ikenna speaks with the authority of his father, as Jesus did with his (John 5:19). Under Ikenna's trickster-worthy keep, an act that should have made Benjamin and his brothers pariahs at their school soon transfigures them into celebrated "ambassadors of the school" (72),

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returning with full scholarships, honoured at a school assembly by the very faculty Ikenna has chastised

(72).[150] Ikenna most prominently merits his savior status after rescuing his brothers from the political

rioting that ensued after General Abacha reacted to losing the 1993 general election by imprisoning his

political opponents and refusing to cede power. On the day of the "election uprising," Benjamin's friends

are picked up from school by their fathers, and Benjamin initially and irrationally wants to wait for his

father despite Boja's obvious protest: "Daddy isn't coming" (117). But Ikenna *does* come through, as the

front-page headline of the *Akure Herald* would recount: "*Young Hero drives his younger brother to*

safety" (116). Within Ikenna's setting, these examples position Ikenna as a Christ figure by conflating

Ikenna's salvific actions with those of a "divinized hero" (Ezigbo 168).

Ikenna, however, also transgresses local assumptions about Christ figures as tellingly as Abulu

transgresses assumptions about Èsù. The trouble with singularly conflating salvation with heroism is that

it provokes an eerily familiar question: if he could save others, why could he not save himself (Matthew

7:42)? A number of Ikenna's insights and action draw on Christian mythology in a manner that challenges

its lasting colonial enculturation as principally a source of empowerment. Benjamin had long found

Pastor Collins's humility notably unusual—as it *would* be for Nigerian clergy, according to Obioma

(Frykholm 34)—but recalled how "Ikenna once said that he was not a foolish man for his meekness, but

that he was humble because he was 'born-again'" (253). Ikenna's reasoning, which intones the paradox of

a "meek" *Christus Victor*, seems both to comfort and puzzle Ben, as it should. When Ikenna starts fishing,

Benjamin recognizes the gravity in Ikenna's desire to replace their dead pet fish—whose life was small,

frail, and fleeting—by aptly describing Ikenna's experience of that desire as having "awakened the

possibility of resurrecting Yoyodon, the fish" (11).[151] Ikenna's care for Yoyodon anticipates the novel's

most detailed demonstration of Ikenna's affection for the meek: his care for an injured sparrow. As Ben

recalls,

> [Ikenna] was sitting in the corridor of the house alone one Christmas Eve while the others were
>
> inside dancing and singing carols, eating, and drinking, when a bird fell to the dirt in front of him.

. . Ikenna's soul cleaved to the sparrow, and he guarded it jealously for three days, feeding it. . .Mother asked him to let it go, but he refused. Then, one morning, he lifted the bird's lifeless body in his hand…his heart was broken. (153)

These memories surface, poignantly, while Ben is burying Ikenna, enjoining Ikenna with the object of his failed care: "He and Boja [had] covered the sparrow with sand until the bird was buried under the earth. This was exactly how Ikenna vanished, too" (154). Ben glides between cosmological metaphors, remembering Ikenna's "soul" cleaving to the sparrow even as he describes Ikenna's burial position as "ovoid, the shape of a bird" because Ikenna

was, in fact, a sparrow; a fragile thing who did not design his own fate. It was designed for him. His *chi*, the personal god the Igbos believe everyone had, was weak. . . This was the reason why, by the time he become a teenager, he'd already had his fill of sinister events and personal tragedies, for he was a mere sparrow who lived in a world of black storms. (147)

Chi enjoys many connotations beyond "personal god" (M. Ukpong 116–17) and has even been enlisted in Christian thought (Ezigbo 145, 181–83, 281), but Benjamin's description of *chi* sits conspicuously outside the rubric of colonial Christian theism. The chief theological tension confronting Benjamin is not reconciling belief in "personal gods" with monotheism; it is reconciling an image of a "weak," "fragile delicate bird" (153) with the image of a one-dimensional *Christus Victor*. Ultimately, Ben turns to a pre-colonial lineage of his contemporary spiritual orientation to recognize a Christological paradox denied. This turning presents a messy, unpredictable, but nevertheless instrumental post-colonial resource through which Christological paradoxes are nascently reintroduced into a flattened, colonial Christ myth.

The Fishermen's inchoate venture to resurrect Christological paradoxes through cosmologies with pre-colonial pedigrees critically hinges on the narrative consanguinity between Ikenna's and Abulu's suffering. The verse alluding to Abulu as a pigeon over whom God watches (Matthew 6:26) references what most English translations render, generically, "birds of the air" (which could be pigeons), although when the kernel sentiments and imagery in this verse are repeated later in Matthew's Gospel the "birds of the air" are now "sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31). Ikenna believed sparrows had no home (153), like the

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pigeons in Ben's Sunday-school hymn. God's watch over both proves far from promising. Similarly, the imagery used by Ikenna's mother when reprimanding him for believing Abulu—whom she insists is not "even greater than…the tadpoles you picked from the river" (105)—haunts us at the moment Ben sees Ikenna's bloodied body:

> Obembe was not alone in the kitchen. Mr. Bode stood beside him, his hands on his head, gnashing his teeth. Yet, there was a third person, who, however, had become a lesser creature than the fish we caught at Omi-Ala. This person lay facing the refrigerator, his wide-opened eyes still and fixed in one place. It was obvious these eyes could not glimpse a thing. (142)

Ikenna's cross-personification with Abulu reaches its crucible in Ikenna's final demise. Their otherness is transfigured into preternatural fellowship fomented in their purported keeper's abandonment. Far from simply indicting faith, *The Fishermen* finesses the solidarity of their suffering into a post-colonial challenge to claim more wholly the gruesome "foolishness" of *Christus Dolor* Christologies. Such Christologies, as Ezigbo emphasizes, raise difficult questions—which is the point:

> …since many Nigerian theologians have expressed Jesus Christ to befit the indigenous worldview and the experience of Nigerian people and have presented Jesus as an answer to some of the cultural, liberation, and religious questions that some people are asking, *if Jesus were also to be presented simultaneously as a question and solution to the needs of the people of Nigeria, what would he and Nigerians look like*? (Ezigbo 19, emphasis mine)

 If one looked at him, could Abulu be recognized in Ikenna? Could Ikenna be recognized in Abulu? Ben's recognition of both discloses a Christological connection between Ben's tadpole allusion and *gloria crucis* imagery resonating through Ben's continued description of Ikenna's broken body:

> …his hands were splayed wide apart as though nailed to an invisible cross *. . .* The floor was drenched in blood that slowly journeyed under the refrigerator, and, uncannily—like the rivers Niger and Benue whose confluence at Lokoja birthed a broken and mucky nation. (142)

The Fishermen deftly integrates an allusion to John 7:38 ("Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from them" NIV) to invoke the *Christus Dolor* paradox. Instead of

invoking "living water" as a metaphor for power, *The Fishermen* posits "living water" as a euphemism for blood.

As if looking through a glass darky, Ben espies an intimacy between Christological paradoxes pairing bloodshed with new life and the colonial/post-colonial violence that bought Nigeria into being. Ben's image of Ikenna resonates deeply with Volf's study of *gloria crucis* and community formation. When Paul contends, "Because there is one bread we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17 ESV), observes Volfe, "Paul is referring to "the *crucified* body of Jesus Christ, the body that has refused to remain a self-enclosed singularity, but has opened itself up so that other can freely partake of it" (Volf 47). Whereas *Christus Victor* Christologies reigned in the conquest, formation and continuing "reclamation" of African nations, *The Fishermen* foregroundss the image of Ikenna's "crucified" body as the paradoxical Christological font in which communities transfigure otherness into fellowship. Without such paradoxical moorings, the still-colonial *Christus Victor* of *The Fishermen* is reduced to an anemic regent tethered to his celestial, quasi-colonial throne, not the "radical and paradoxical" God of "the Christ-event" who is "not only sovereign and powerful" but "also powerless and vulnerable" (Ezigbo 213).

In *The Fishermen*, the legacy of colonial violence towards indigenous African spirituality is not epitomized by supplanting African deities; it is epitomized by pauperizing cosmologies often rich in paradox through a colonial Christ myth beggared of its paradoxes. Obioma uses a range of narrative and stylistic devices to reanimate Christological paradoxes anesthetized under colonial rule and atrophied within much contemporary Nigerian Christology. Benjamin's largely concealed adult identity, the African hermeneutic contexts crystalizing key Biblical allusions into paradoxes, and Obioma's weaving of Nigerian "Satanic" trickster imagery into his Christological personifications[152]—cumulatively, these literary strategies suffuse *The Fishermen* with an ambience of ever-looming narrative and hermeneutic uncertainty. The novel's Christological signifiers are tricky indicators of antinomy and surprise, conducive to conveying the messy multiplicity and paradoxes of post-colonial recovery. In

foregroundsing understated *Christus Dolor* paradoxes, the novel foregroundss a ruthless hope that survives disempowerment and death.

Indeed, *The Fishermen* concludes by subtly leveling its harshest critique at lopsided *Christus Victor* religiosity. Ben leaves readers with a portrait of a broken family whose faith has survived, and in some ways thrived, after being forced to face the paradoxes of theodicy. When Ben first returns home from prison he describes his younger brother and sister, David and Nkem, as egrets: the "wool-white birds that appear in flocks after a storm, their wings unspotted, their lives unscathed" like "a man asleep in the midst of a violent storm" (292). Ben quickly augments the hopeful Christological allusion (Matthew 8:24) used to describe David and Nkem by conveying that "egrets were also known for something else: they were often signs or harbingers of good times" (292). When Ben is reunited with Obembe, who has been in hiding and estranged from his family for years, Ben recalls Obembe "had now appeared as real as he once was, like an egret after my storm" (293). The hope Ben associates with the egrets vividly contrasts and Christologically integrates his earlier characterization that, "Hope was a tadpole:/ The thing you caught and brought home…but which, despite being kept in the right water, soon died" (239). Ben's fableization of hope as a captured tadpole despondently typifies descriptions of Ikenna's corpse and Abulu as being lesser than the boys' capriciously fished tadpoles sentenced to die hopelessly slow, disorienting deaths. Furthermore, Ben's fableization cautions us that hope, domesticated, dies uselessly: for Ben and his father, those fragile tadpole hopes include everyday assumptions that "my brothers would always be there" (239) and grander aspirations for "salvation" substantiated as "a new life in Canada" (276). Egrets eat tadpoles (Davies 86): plenty of tadpoles that escaped the fishermen brothers would have been eaten, mercifully, by egrets. As symbols of hope, the egrets do not abrogate earlier fableizations of hope as tadpoles; the wellbeing of egrets *depends* on tadpoles, their paradoxical counter-symbol of hope's frailty and fleetingness. "We rejoice in our suffering," wrote Paul, "knowing that suffering produces…hope" (Romans 5:3-4). In *The Fishermen*, hope is not the sum of our housebroken desires but the anticipated actualization of faith, in unanticipated ways, by a paradoxical God who suffers. Readers are reminded of this Christological hope (likely unwittingly) at Ikenna's funeral as Pastor Collins reads from Hebrews 11,

conspicuously the novel's only Biblical reference identified chapter-and-verse: "Now faith is the substance of things *hoped* for, for the evidence of things not seen" (150, emphasis mine). *The Fishermen* invites us to consider how such paradoxical hope can be recognized in silhouettes or heard in whispers.

Denied the contextually-prized symbols of God's empowerment—access to Western education and to material prosperity—the family's faith nevertheless represents a "tale of redemption" (*Chigozie Obioma Interview: Everything We Do Is Preordained*, Channel), one that goes against the grain of Nigerian Christology by foregroundsing faith as an engagement with paradox rather than as a singular actualization of ambition coded as providential empowerment. Although *The Fishermen* bears witness to African theological efforts to enculturate the Christ myth into indigenous cosmologies, as well as the continued and complex engagement of indigenous West African spiritualties with Nigerian Christian loyalties, Obioma's novel reimagines these efforts and tensions to emphasize why post-colonial Christology must risk embracing the *Christus Dolor* paradoxes that colonial Christology effaced. Should these risky paradoxes be evaded then, vanity of vanities, there is next to nothing Christologically new under the sun that has set on an Empire.

Chapter 6

Culmination and Conclusion:

Risking Being Out Tricked by The Trickster

Soon after beginning my post-colonial literary study of paradoxical Christological tricksters, an unsettling suspicion started surfacing. At first little more than a haunting whisper, this suspicion grew louder over the course of my research; sometimes so deafening it seem to defy exorcism. The temptation to regress into a defensive, silencing dualism pressed hard: would the trickster's power be most compellingly demonstrated by the abject failure of my study, by repeatedly showcasing how I have been out-tricked by the trickster? Conversely, if my work coherently confines the trickster within my discursive purposes, will it not undermine its core characterization of the trickster as a boundary-busting, slippery customer averse to such enclosure? Such dualism—which suggests that my if my argument fails, it succeeds; and if my argument succeeds, it fails—also risks undermining the *possibility of paradox*, for which this dissertation has advocated. As with Paul, whose repeated petitions that a "thorn" be removed from his flesh were met with the paradoxical response, "my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, KJV), my study of Christological tricksters is as thorn-laden as graveyards or roses untended.

That said, prickly risks notwithstanding, my readings of *Green Grass Running Water*, *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The God of Small Things* and *The Fishermen* evince the urgency of recognizing paradox, as figured in literary Christological tricksters, to envision post-colonial empowerment beyond appropriations of colonial power. Even under post-colonial reigns, such appropriations continue pursuing strength as a zero-sum game achieved only by weakening others and expatiating otherness. The Christological tricksters in my study challenge trenchant Manichaean dualisms, the rubric for colonial power (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 41), and invite us to entertain alternative possibilities of

constituting personhood, constructing community, and imagining difference. Far from presenting didactic

morality tales crisply distinguishing honourable protagonists from conniving antagonists, the four core

texts in my study hypostatically enjoin paradoxical characterizations of empowerment and

disempowerment, strength and weakness, selfhood and otherness. For Volf, sin signals power channelled

towards a "will to purity" that rejects otherness (74). The texts in my study subvert such sin, presenting

Christ figures who are much more paradoxical than pure and, therefore, who are "ambivalent, polluting,

dangerous" (Volf 74). Whereas colonial Christologies were often demure about the Christ's dangerously

polluting ambivalences, the post-colonial Christs I conjure have their ancient paradoxes revitalized by

including paradoxical, pre-colonial trickster figures into their personifications.

Far from singularly signalling hostility to the Christ myth, King's satirizing of a settler, colonial

Christ in my first core text, *Green Grass Running Water*, reminds those with Christian affiliations of

Christological paradoxes steadily repressed. King's most explicit references to the Christ myth present

Jesus as the entitled son of the Big Boss Above, not as someone who "although He existed in the form of

God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6, NASB). King's most

explicit satire is directed at the lopsided Christ myth of colonizing Christianity, exposing it as a

bastardization of classical Christological formulations for its proclamation of a muscular Christ who

throws hard punches and does not bruise easily. But *Green Grass Running Water* also challenges readers

to consider the paradoxical veneration of the sacred through humour—a sensibility across many

Indigenous traditions in what we today call North America. Laughing at the Christ myth is not mere

mockery; indeed, it is a gesture of hermeneutic hospitality reviving Christological paradox, one that

enables us to engage the Christ myth in *Green Grass Running Water* as both stranger and friend.

King's personification of the Christ myth within the more "realist" narrative plane of the *Green

Grass Running Water*, Eli Stands Alone, is a much more sympathetic character than King's more

explicitly satirized Christ, but as my reading demonstrates, Eli shares critical parallels with King's

satirized Christ. Long estranged from him ancestral community while holding a distinguished

professorship in a distant metropolis, Eli returns to the familiarity of his modest homestead still bearing

the stigma of distant but menacing power. Titled "Young Man Who Walks on Water," King's satirized Christ succumbs to the water he cannot control, as does Eli. King's satirized Christ insists "no one can help me . . . no one can tell me anything" (350); Eli stands alone against the environmental incursion of a damn-building project on his ancestral lands, a post-colonial continuation of settler colonial patterns of land appropriation and environmental encroachment. Eli, who drowns when the dam bursts is both stranger and friend, like the Christ. *Green Grass Running Water* vigorously juggles our imaginations by further interlacing the Trinitarian Christ myth within the novel's circuit of Pan-American trickster figures, particularly Coyote, who is, with macabre irony, the architect of Eli's demise. Beyond the novel's generously peppered innuendos and insinuations connecting Coyote and the Christ, Coyote "concludes" *Green Grass Running Water* with a chiasmatic transfiguration of the novel's opening dialogue, spotlighting the inclusion of the trickster Christ myth into narrative's paradoxical colure. The closing dialogue of *Green Grass Running Water* does not resolve the Christological trickster paradoxes it raises. Instead, the conclusion revealingly cycles us back to the novel's opening so those who have ears may hear these dialogues differently. *Green Grass Running Water* levels stinging criticisms against colonial Christianity, but a failure to read beyond these criticisms risks dismissing the complexity of the ways in which Indigenous spiritualities have engaged with the Christ myth.

The second of my core texts, Walcott's *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, draws on a medley of kin African Caribbean trickster tropes to revive Christological paradoxes diminished within Caribbean messianic movements channelling post-colonial hopes into recovering, if not returning to, a romanticized African heritage. *Dream* reflects the Christological language of its milieu by chiefly using fabulist "lion" imagery excised of its "lamb" paradox to signal these messianic hopes. Furthermore, it enmeshes this lion imagery within fabulist figurations from Caribbean trickster tales rich in paradox. In the absence of the lamb, *Dream* Christologically posits a trickster "monkey" (surrounded by characters whose names clearly signify "mosquito," "tiger" and "rat"). Indeed, even in terms of raw aesthetics, the play presents a compelling criticism of "back to Africa" movements through its animated performances of these Caribbean tricksters who share a West African genealogy, showcasing a living, Caribbeanized inheritance

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of African roots. Set chiefly within the dreamscape of Makak, who believes he is a lion-like messiah entrusted to usher the downtrodden back to Africa, *Dream* demonstrates how such lionic Christological titles, when stripped of paradox, evince a longing not just to escape the material suffering sown by plantation colonialism, but also to escape an internalized otherness so severe it denies recognition of personhood. If not addressed, cautions *Dream*, such longings risk externalizing themselves violently. Drawing on mask-imagery with Christological, carnival and Fanonesque connotations, the drama explores the possibilities of a different soteriological trick. Here post-colonialism is not chiefly imagined as a purification rite to purge otherness (achieved through migration or otherwise). Rather, Makak is a seemingly ironic but aptly "lionic" Christ-figure who represents a countenance with Christological otherness—the otherness of the lamb, or the monkey—without which the Christological lion cannot, paradoxically, be whole. Walcott's play directs soteriological aspirations away from a return to Africa and invests them in the reciprocated otherness of perichoresis. In *Dream*, personhood is recognized in community—that is, recognized in a communion with others that runs so deeply that the paradoxical *personifications* of characters extend hypostatically, dramaturgically and cunningly into each others' otherness.

My third core text, Roy's *The God of Small Things*, shares an elusively subtle figuration of post-colonial Christological tricksterism which is as easy to miss as a pearl hidden in a field. Ironically, among the core narratives in my study, the title of Roy's novel seems to identify bluntly the Christological paradox it engages: the Christ's transcendence and immanence, his heavenly bigness enjoined to his incarnate smallness. Indeed, Roy's principal Christ figure, Velutha, is a minor character (albeit in the Fifth Business sense) fatally betrayed by the novel's chief characters who, unlike him, are high-caste, wealthy descendants of Macaulyist middlemen. Roy's novel never suggests the suffering of the high-caste conspirators who orchestrated Velutha's death is any of way expiatory, let alone approximate to Velutha's suffering. Rather, *The God of Small Things* presents a literary meditation on suffering akin not only to that of Judas who betrayed, but also to Peter who denied and to Paul who persecuted. Furthermore, the tricksterism with which colonial Macaulyists were tasked—to erect and straddle taxonomic distinctions

facilitating colonial governance—highlighted their precarious taxonomic indeterminacy within such colonial logic. For Roy's high-caste characters, who are Orthodox ("Syrian") Christians, practicing a variation of the religion of their colonizers exacerbates this indeterminacy. A more confident border-breaker and object of high-caste desire and anxiety, Velutha dies for high-caste sins, but his death does not affect a forensic soteriology dominant in Western and Northern Christian practice. Velutha's soteriology is decidedly more Eastern in its imaginary.

Over the course of *The God of Small Things*, Roy sows tiny doubts regarding the post-colonial finality of Velutha's defeat, if not his death. The chief site of Christological transfiguration in Roy's novel is tricky: it can be found in the perspective-oriented consciousness—the diegesis—of the novel's anonymous, third-person, supposedly omniscient, supposedly "transcendent" narrator. Subtle shifts in deictic indicators circumscribing key symbols evince a transfiguration of the narrator's capacity to see through Velutha's eyes, to become more Velutha-like in a manner that signals theosis, the dominant soteriological goal in Orthodox traditions as practiced by Roy's characters. As Christological deification, theosis is an invitation to participate in the Christ paradox, including its penchant for antinomy—the stranger is the friend, the lion is lamb, the big is the small—undermining colonial fixations over classification. The Christological "story" in Roy's novel is not located in the series of events the narrator asynchronously details; it is located in the traceable (if nascent) theosis-evoking, boundary-blurring, hypostatic transfigurations of the storyteller's telling.

The last of my core texts, Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*, explores and critiques popular charismatic-leaning Nigerian Christologies for their impoverished paradoxes *despite* their otherwise noteworthy departures from colonial Christian thought. Although charismatic-leaning Christologies, as witnessed in *The Fishermen*, are generally more amenable to African cosmologies than was missionary Christianity, these Christologies nevertheless reproduce colonial characterizations of the Christ as a chiefly regal conqueror. Similarly, although theologians identify the African revival of ancient *Christus Victor* Christologies, which shifts emphases from dominant Western and Northern models of forensic soteriology, this revival also reproduces a colonial formulation of a warrior-king Christ denuded of

paradox. Richly contextualized in its Nigerian Christian milieu, Obioma's critique subtly broaches the trenchant currency of regionally-varied, post-colonial Pan-African "veranda Christianity," a colonial model of concentrating access to colonial "protection," education and governance within missionary stations and settlements. Richly contextualized in its Nigerian Christian milieu, *The Fishermen* scrutinizes stunted post-colonial Christological leanings that license violence and cannot engage the paradoxes of theodicy. Moreover, the *Christus Victor* discomfitingly appropriates powers that are hardly exclusively colonial—but nevertheless explicitly colonial—in their Christian provenance. These powers chiefly include the power to govern, the power to mediate knowledge, and the power to materialize abundance. The *Christus Victor* promises these things; the *Christus Dolor* embodies what happens when they fall apart.

Like *Green Grass Running Water*, *The Dream* and *The God of Small Things*, *The Fishermen* tackles the Christological implications of theodicy within its milieu and revitalizes Christological paradoxes by integrating regional pre-colonial trickster into its literary figuration of the Christ myth. On the one hand, *The Fishermen* remains deeply steeped in the Biblicism (including emphasis on the Hebrew Bible) characterizing post-colonial African hermeneutics. But Obioma's novel also challenges long-standing conventions of Biblical translation. Because the West African pre-colonial trickster has been translated as "Satan" in Yoruba and Igbo Bibles for nearly a century, *The Fishermen'*s Christological figuration scandalously integrates a seemingly satanic anathema as it challenges readers to consider more nuanced strategies of enculturating Christological paradoxes, including valuing formulations of paradoxes of theodicy in indigenous cosmologies. *The Fishermen* neither idealizes nor idolizes suffering, Christologically or otherwise. Obioma's novel, however, ventures a daunting criticism. Yes, alleviation of suffering and pursuits of material security are honourable desires, perhaps more obviously so in post-colonial contexts. For those whose lives are already cruciform, the promises of the *Christus Dolor* pale in comparison to those of the *Christus Victor*. And yet, as *The Fishermen* testifies, the paradox of the Christ myth, even for those seeking escape from colonialism's lasting depravations, remains enfeebled if the *Christus Victor* suffers the loss of the *Christus Dolor*.

As tricksters, the post-colonial Christ figures I conjure in my readings of *Green Grass Running Water*, *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*, *The God of Small Things* and *The Fishermen* signal the urgency of recognizing the paradoxical core of the Christ myth. Severed from its paradoxes, the colonial Christ myth can be too easily mistaken as *only* the stranger, the lion, the transcendent and the victor. The four core narratives explored craftily recognize the Christ myth *also* as the friend, the lamb, the immanent and the defeated. Sampling from settler, plantation, proxy and veranda variations of colonial Christianizing, the Christological tricksters I have gathered in this extended, interdisciplinary, expository experiment outmanoeuvre the seemingly incommensurable otherness of colonial Manichaeism. More importantly, they begin to undermine a colonial logic of differentiation—of othering—that continues to enjoy dangerous post-colonial currency in the domains of these Christological tricksters. As these Christological tricksters demonstrate, the challenges of paradoxical identification—including contrapuntal language, shifty signifiers, and protean perspectivation—value uncertainty, ambiguity and incompleteness as resources crucial to fulfilling the expectations of post-colonial genesis.

Let me close on a note at once academic and autobiographical. I was conceived in London, born in Bombay, and raised mostly in Toronto. But the pattern of straddling identities had been ingrained in my history's DNA generations before. In India, where religious identity can be central to one's social and civil locus, my father's ancestors were Muslims a handful of generations ago; my grandfather, who was and remained a Hindu his entire life, raised his children as Sikhs; my father, otherwise rebelliously secular and agnostic, married my mother, an Anglo-Indian Christian, and agreed to give me a Sikh name while affectionately tolerating my upbringing as a Christian. I was born left handed—considered "inauspicious" (Deepalakshmi)— until I was "taught" to write the right way, but I have long suspected that seeds of *vama*, the "left" path (Vajpayee and Semmler 46-47), germinate in my consciousness like lilies in some forgotten field. I was born with a small circular birthmark in the middle of my forehead that looked just like a *bindhi*: the respite I sought from being teased in India for not *really* looking like a boy was replaced, in Canada, by not *really* looking like a Canadian. I was born on July 21, the feast day of St. Simon the Fool, the sixth century Syrian whose scandalous behavior included throwing walnuts at priests

whose sermons lasted too long (Lindvall 55-56). The trickster, as the "personification of human ambiguity" (Diamond 189), as "a celebration of the failure of identity" (Diamond 201), paradoxically remains a figure I find troublingly familiar and comfortingly unsettling. I suspect the tone of my thesis reveals, unintentionally, a posture towards trickster Christology emerging from my biography, but I hope the arguments I have presented convincingly extend beyond the horizons of my personal history.

In particular, I hope my study opens and extends pathways for future explorations connecting diverse post-colonial histories and paradoxes. As Christianity steadily becomes a religion of the global South, the urgency of these post-colonial explorations falls into sharper relief, providing disparate regions with shared tropes through which insights into post-colonial complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and transformation can be shared. Grotesque post-colonial appropriations of colonial identification—national, religious—remain dangerously fixated on fixity, effacing possibilities of identification open to the pluralism of a self in dynamic communion with otherness. Without necessarily displacing or devaluing hybridity/creolization as critically fruitful strategies through which post-colonial engagements with otherness can be theorized, paradox licenses a sense of mystery permitting otherness to be engaged as alterity, largely outside a discursive circuit privileging the dialectic transformation of the other into a *tertium quid* hybrid. I also hope the family of analyses in my study can be extended and enriched by including literary Christological tricksters drawn from a broader range of post-colonial sites: Australasia, the Middle East, and Hong Kong, to start. Ideally, my project encourages a conversation that by design seeks to grow in scope and participants. I hope my study continues stirring renewed interest in recognizing the Christ myth, in its ancient and "classical" formulations, as a contemporary trickster figure proselytizing discourses of power that seek fulfillment not in the certainties of fixity but the paradoxes of possibility

Finally, I should confess that my study focused on former British colonial sites, so I assumed most of my theological inquiry would lead me down solidly Protestant paths, forgiving the occasional Roman Catholic twist. The provenance of Eastern Orthodox thought across the post-colonial sites I studied was unexpected: the *salos* or "holy fool" in King's *Green Grass Running Water;* the perichoresis

in Walcott's *The Dream on Monkey Mountain*; the theosis in Roy's *The God of Small Things*; and the *Christus Victor* in Obioma's *The Fishermen*. Even though the Christian identifications in my core texts, with the exception of Roy's novel, were explicitly Protestant or Roman Catholic, these texts borrowed from local Christological thought that had implicit, but critical Orthodox inflections. The importance of Orthodox thought to post-colonial Christology clearly merits continued exploration. Historically, the under-explored influence of Orthodox thought on Victorian Christianity (Sanders 138; Wolffe 322) remains a fascinating line of inquiry that would enrich the analyses I have shared. In contemporary post-colonial contexts, I suspect Orthodoxy allows Christian communities to draw on a lineage of Christian thought, including a critical vocabulary, outside the explicit purview of colonial Christianity. Rudyard Kipling's often half-quoted verse about "never the twain shall meet" may pessimistically characterize Eastern and Western Christological traditions, but as I surprisingly discovered over the course of my research, they *do* meet in the paradoxes of the post-colonial Christ myth and its literary transfigurations of a trickster God.

Notes

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[1] My survey of a shared interest in paradox across Christological traditions should not be confused with *detailing* the treatment of the Christ paradox across diverse Christian movements, which remains far beyond the scope of this project.

[2] One's *jati* references a more porous set of communal identifiers than caste/*varna*, including class, regional, and linguistic affiliations (Jacobs 60).

[3] This is a similar style of argument-by-synecdoche that Homi Bhabha makes in his summary of 19th century violence in "By Bread Alone: Signs of Violence in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" in *The Location of Culture* (although my argument is a deliberately more distilled and blunt manner). A similar discussion of how the history of colonialism and post-colonialism is often engaged through a particular synechdotal selection that attempts to speak for the metonymy of the imperial enterprise can be found in Ranjana Khanna's discussion of Derrida, Hamlet, and South African Apartheid (267-270).

[4] John Graves Simcoe named Amherst Ontario after the Lord Amherst to whom I am referring (Brown 201).

[5] Refrains of this attitude can be heard as late 1877 from the British government, after this attitude was appropriated by Parliament from the Company. Noteworthy is the proclamation from Victoria, Empress of India, that "it is to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in anywise favoured, none molested or disquieted, by reason of their religious faith or observances . . . and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with religious belief of worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure" (qtd. in Larson 42).

[6] Although this sentiment, along with the English missionary movement itself, came into heavy stride during the 19th century, its antecedents can be witnessed in English national culture's long brewing Christ complex. As Michael Bryson documents:

In John Davis's *The World's Hydrographical Description* (1595), the English are "by the eternal an infallible presence of the Lord predestined to be sent unto all these Gentiles […] to give light to all the rest of the world." In Richard Hakluyt's 1589 *The Principal! Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Queen Elizabeth "Shall by God's assistance, in her Short space, work many great and unlooked for effects, increase her dominions, enrich her coffers, and reduce many pagans to the faith of Christ" (37). In John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), England is a "nation chosen before any other [. . .] a nation of prophets, of Sages, and of worthies" (Bryson 48; see Hakluyt 37; see Milton 743).

[7] In fact, by 1926 E. Stanley Jones, an American missionary in India, was calling this traditional pairing of colonialism and Christianity "The Great Hindrance" to spreading the gospel and argued that Christianity would never flourish in India unless India "is politically self-governing" (102).

[8] This question has been a central preoccupation of Christian theologians, but it has never *only* been that. Muslim and Hindu Christologies, for example, ought not to be dismissed, especially in post-colonial milieus (Bassuk; Tennet 213–17)

[9] Post-colonial studies' engagement with Christology, understood as a literary exercise, may be significantly facilitated by the emergence of post-colonial studies within literary studies: R.S. Sugitharajah and Catherine Keller both observe that post-colonial studies emerged from literary studies, and that (in Keller's words) "major post-colonial theorists, while dependent on poststructuralist philosophy (particularly Derrida for Young and Spivak, Jaques Lacan and Michel Foucault for Bhabha), are in fact teachers of literature" (*God and Power* 100; see also Sugirtharajah, *Post-Colonial Criticism and Biblical Intepretation* 21–23). Summarizing post-colonial studies' literary provenance, and the emancipatory capacity of literature and language, are discussions I will develop in this thesis.

[10] Milbank's reading of Hegel's formulation of a dialectic, in which antitheses dissolve into synthesis by processes of negation and sublation, argues that dialectic erases differences in the name of a higher unity, thereby treating differences as problem that must be resolved. It should be noted that this reading of Hegel is contested by critics such as Zizek in *The Monstrosity of Christ* and Stephen Morton in "Post-colonial Theory and the Quest for Critique."

[11] In French, "direction" and "meaning" can be captures by *sens*, a "pun" that Derrida's work apparently plays with liberally (as in, to lose direction is to lose meaning). See translator A. Bass' notes (xix) in Derrida's 1978 edition of *Writing and Difference.*

[12] Mihlailovic's close reading of Bakthin's Russian leads him to assert Bakhtin's description of communication as a

> doublet of "non-fusion and non-interpenetration" is unquestionably Chalcedonian in provenance. Once again, peculiar to the Russian expression of this doctrine—and abundantly in evidence here—is its sense of paradox bordering on dualism. . . In a statement that effectively re-enacts the conflict addressed by the Chalcedonian decision, Bakhtin yokes "non-interpenetration" with "non-fusion" as terms of contrast and paradox as much as of equivalence. (136; see also 15, 22)

[13] This statement, usually attributed to Tertullian, can be quoted from a number of sources. Osborn's critically interrogates common translations and interpretations of the statement, and I do not want my reference here to suggest this is what Osborn believes. However, his project of toppling the conventional reading of this statement demonstrates, if unintentionally, how entrenched in Christian thought Tertullian's valorization of paradox seems.

[14] Such statements quickly provoke questions about language and history being drawn into a "hermeneutic circle"—where language concurrently functions as the progenitor and progeny of historicized consciousness—and this is an issue I engage over the course of my thesis.

[15] A very similar argument, in style, has been repeated by feminist theologians who have questioned why introducing feminine identifications within the Trinity—such as Dame Julian of Norwich's "Mother Jesus" (in McLaughlin 134) or contemporary theologians of wisdom/*sophia* Christologies (see Migliore 210)—might not better champion the paradox present in the ancient creeds (see E. S. Johnson 164–67).

[16] One suspects Sannah's views might find a prominent post-colonial sympathizer in Gayatri Spivak, who posits that one "of the boldest acts of the Guatama Buddha was to decide to compose his doctrines in a Creole (which I consider a vernacular linguistic mode) rather than composing them in "the refined language" of his regal heritage (Spivak).

[17] A thoughtful exploration on the relationship between phenomenology and eschatology in Moltmann's work can be found in *Phenomenology and Eschatology* by Neal DeRoo and John Panteleimon Manoussakis.

[18] Admittedly, the status of English in Joh's post-colonial contexts—South Korea, and the Korean-American diaspora—differs notably from the status English enjoys in the post-colonial contexts I discuss in this thesis. Although the sheer difference between the Korean and English languages helps Joh emphatically demonstrate the Christ myth's linguistic malleability, I will present similar arguments about the politics of particularity, paradox, and pluralism in post-colonial literary texts—admittedly all written in English, but written from very different British post-colonies. This need not suggest any fundamental incommunicability between what I explore here and post-colonial Christologies explored in, say, Korean or Spanish, but extending this thesis beyond a comparative study of post-colonial English-language Christologies, in their literary transfigurations, would extend the scope of my academic ambitions far beyond the limits of my scholarly skills.

[19] A well-known example of this would be the Italian Jesuit missionary, Roberto Nobli, who arrived in southern India in 1606, studied Tamil, Telegu, and Sanskrit, claimed the gospel for a lost Veda, took on the garb and ritual functions of a Brahmin priest to the point of wearing a holy string and engaging other Brahmins in the spirit of irenic debate. Nobili's efforts seem more "culturally sensitive" and less chauvinistic or invasive than those proposed by other missionaries during the expansion of empire, but Nobili did little to challenge caste apartheid and achieved his culturally sensitive Christianity by casting his lot with the reigning cultural hegemonies he encountered.

[20] The proximity of the terms "logocentric" and "logos Christology" deserve some qualification. Many criticisms of Logos Christologies, including some from those pursuing Wisdom/Sophia Christologies, have produced incultured and engaging reformulations of Trinitarian Christologies in their own right. However, later in my thesis I will argue that insofar as these Christologies posit that the logos of Philo or Derrida is necessarily the logos of John's Gospel, they miss the lush irony of the Johnian logos, which is characterized not simply as some principle of transcendent metonymic unity, but as an incarnated paradox.

[21] Among prominent scholars of Christianity, who are working outside literary departments—the traditional location of post-colonial studies—I already have mentioned Sugitharajah, Rieger, Joh, and Dube. To this list, Keller adds Fernando Segovia and Stephen Moore (*God and Power* 100).

[22] Kenneth Kantzer's reading of Karl Barth's Christology makes a similar point tidily:

The relationship of the God-man to the atonement is inescapable. Christianity is not a religion of Christ and does not present a gospel of Christ but rather presents a gospel about Christ and his redemption. This redemption is possible only because of who Christ is (28).

[23] Hynes and Doty remind us that tricksters "may have manifold modes of appearance even within one culture. After the figure was named within academic disciplines, it began to be used as a helpful descriptor for a very wide range of characters . . ." (9).

[24] In Cole's text, "intrusions" into the text by Coyote and Raven are literally marked by paw or claw prints in the margins of the page.

[25] Although the tone of these definitions already sounds Christological, the Christ myth has not been a conventional site of anthropological study for the same reasons that Europe and the United States were not. Nevertheless, sometimes, the Christological tone of the highly structuralist, modernist anthropologists can be quite striking: E.E. Evans-Pritchard's theorization of Zande tricksters posited that a "universal feature" of a trickster was to function "as both revolutionary and savior" (Evans-Pritchard 97).

[26] One could also add that clinging to interpretations of the Biblical God who is too wholesome to be crafty must gingerly obviate, at very least, the impact of Jeremiah's lament, "O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived" (Jeremiah 20:7 KJV) or Jesus's cautioning that the coming of the Son of Man (an eschatological euphemism) was "near, right at the door" like a "thief" (Matthew 24:33,43 KJV)—curiously the same place, according to God's cautions to Cane, that sin lurks waiting in its "desire for him" (Genesis 4:6; compare also with Revelation 3:20).

[27] Consider the ancient and enduring 2nd century meditation on the paradox of the Christ myth by Melito of Sardis: "he who hung up the earth is himself hung up; he who fixed the heavens is himself fixed [on a cross]; he who fastened everything is fastened to the wood; the Master is reviled; God has been killed" (in O'Collins 45). The meditation lucidly evinces the confusion of categories endemic to tricksters, but its emphatically sombre tone so stresses the painful features of the Christ myth that highlighting playful features of the paradox seems depreciatory, diminishing.

[28] "Native" seems to be the American version of what Canadians who do not call themselves Indians, in terms of having a South Asian ancestry, "officially" title people who are "First Nations."

[29] On the one hand, the parable seems to conflate differences between strangers and neighbours, for the stranger is held up as the exemplar of neighbourly behaviour when Jesus is asked, "Who is my neighbour?" On the other hand: even after helping the stranger, the helpful man in this parable never tries to befriend the injured man, for becoming a friend seems to be neither a prerequisite nor necessarily a goal of extending neighbourly love to the stranger.

[30] Even the word "friend" is sometimes used to deride his strange choice of companions: he is charged with being a "friend" of tax collectors and sinners (Luke 7:34; Matthew 11:19).

[31] He warns his disciples that they too will be strangers (that is, "hated") as he was a stranger (Matthew 10:22; John 15:18) but that they will be given forgiveness and protection—a "covenant" remarkably similar to the one God makes with Cain: forgiveness and protection in exchange for being a stranger everywhere.

[32] Doueihi identifies this as ability to work in multiple narrative modes as a trickster's trait: "By dividing himself, so to speak, into narrator and character, he both tells the story and is 'in' the story" (200).

[33] Of course, there is much truth such readings. To borrow a phrase from Achille Mbembe, the parody in King's novel partly functions by "taking over the signs and language of officialdom . . . to remythologize [a] conceptual universe," to "undermine officialdom by showing how arbitrary and vulnerable is officialise and turning it all into an object of ridicule," to allow "individuals, by their laughter, [to] kidnap power and force it, as if by accident, to examine its own vulgarity" (108).

[34] Sanchez characterizes the Biblical narratives as "closed, authoritative, linear" without qualification, ignoring scores of radically varied *midrashim* that have been composed within Rabbinical Judaism, ignoring similar centuries of debate within and between Christian and Muslim scholars regarding these narratives' possible interpretations and implications. Walton, likewise, does not quote Genesis, attempt her own exegesis, consider alternatives exegeses, or recognize that the reading of Genesis she critiques is a specific reading produced by a particular hermeneutic.

[35] Marta Dvorak diverges from many critics in that she at least senses (but does not develop) the idea that King's novel presents a narrative brain-twister of Biblical proportions when she identifies that in *Green Grass Running Water*, "Like the four Gospels of the New Testament, there are four layers of story-telling, four interwoven stories" (87). One may take Dvorak to task for assuming the four Gospels are read as "layers" or "interwoven stories" across Christian traditions, but I appreciate her drawing attention to a semblance few critics have recognized.

[36] This text has multiple authors, despite the use of the singular personal pronoun "I." I suspect the authors are trying to make a point regarding tensions between individual and shared authority/authorship/ownership of a text.

[37] If the story of Israel and God remains a central narrative of the Bible, its "linearity" is compromised by significant detours taken in stories like that of Job (who never mentions Israel), or of Esther (who never mentions God).

[38] King's hybridized mythology spans the considerable distance between Iroquois territory (which includes Toronto), Blackfoot territory (which includes Calgary), and the territory of the Southern Plains nations (which includes Dallas).

[39] Laughing at the sacred confronts colonial Christian thought with the paradox of appearing to debase that which it venerates, which is what the doctrine of the incarnation effectively does. Those who have changed a child's soiled diaper can appreciate the clownish trickster logic needed to imagine that the

person through whom "all things were made"(John 1:3 KJV) has long been represented in Christian art, iconography, and hymns as an infant, a creature incapable of controlling its bowels let alone framing the cosmos. Marcion, the Gnostic responsible for bequeathing Christian tradition its first "canonized" New Testament, could not tolerate arguments that the doctrine of the incarnation entailed the Christ's full humanity because he could not imagine that the Christ, even as an adult, would have a body that could quite literally be "stuffed with excrement" (Lock 71) Those who have held the hand of a person as they are dying, as was the case when I last held my father's hand, can appreciate the macabre trickster logic needed to imagine that one in whom "was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4) has long been represented in Christian art, iconography, and hymns as a dying human, vulnerable and scandalously mortal at the end of his life as he was in the beginning. Closely associating a transcendent, eternal, immutable deity with a temporal, changing human seems to debase that which it venerates, but this is just the kind of "irreverence" incarnational theology demands. If humour is in part "the creative realization of unsuspected congruence between hitherto unrelated aspects of life," asks Pyper, "then what could be a better source of humour than the idea of God become man?" (Pyper, "Humour" 314) Kidwell, Noley, and Tinker concur: "The sacred is the unexpected, and humor is the juxtaposition of things we don't expect. . . The peculiarity of the clown's world is to turn reality on its head" (92). This approach to incarnational theology, though scarce in much Christian thought, was at least not lost on the holy fools or clowns (*salos*) of early Orthodox tradition, as Guy Stroumsa contends: in "a paradoxical way . . . [the *salos*] represents a kind of divinization. By His incarnation, Christ had crossed the boundaries between the divine and the human worlds. The *salos*, who wants to become like Christ, seeks to descend in order to climb" (240). Drawing on the kindred paradox in Native traditions of sacralising laughter, King's humorous treatment of Christian themes and motifs works so well because it marries sharp satire with sympathy in highlighting the comedic features of Christian incarnational paradoxes.

[40] Highway explicitly connects his Objibway/ Ashinawbe trickster Nanabush to "Coyote," "Raven" and other Native trickster figures (*The Rez Sisters* xii).

[41] Nanabush is happy Jesus shows up because, as he tells Jesus, "I'm a little short" and wonders if his friend will "do that thing" if he just orders a glass of water, to which Jesus warmheartedly agrees. Soon Jesus, in a polite but cocky tone one stereotypically associates with Anglo Canadians, starts chiding Nanabush about his lack of ambition, telling him he might increase his flock if he downplayed some of his "odder" beliefs. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Talking Bush?" responds the incredulous Nanabush as the two begin a full-fledged theological debate about whose mythology, in Nanabush's words, "lacks verisimilitude." The conversation ends pleasantly as the drinks arrive and Jesus turns Nanabush's water into wine, respectfully asking, "Red or white?" to which Nanabush's replies, "Duuuuude!" and Jesus knowingly says, "Red it is!" (Dennis) For all the ways Jesus and Nanabush may be different in Dennis's sketch, Jesus in being represented humorously is being represented in the same manner Nanabush is represented.

[42] A gentler variation of this paradox can also be evinced in Native humour that presents a more straightforward critique of Christian hypocrisy. Vine Deloria Jr., who like King plays with Nietzsche and Biblical imagery in the titles of his polemical meditations, *God is Red* and *Custer Died for Your Sins*, presents a mock conference report in "froM thE archiveS," dated "December 2, 1504," recording Native theorizations about their first contact with Europeans. It concludes that while some Natives believed Europeans may have been the Lost Tribes of Israel, "the Lost Tribes theory was rejected, however, as they apparently had no contact with the Ten Commandments or at least show none of the effects of that civilizing influence" (2). King intones similar irony in his short story, "Bad Men Who Love Jesus" in which Jesus, a refugee in Garden River Indian Reserve in Testament, Alberta, is on the lam for causing a stir by saying, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor" ("Bad Men Who Love Jesus" 93). As the police approach the reserve, the band council walks him to the edge of the reserve, gives him direction, promises to slow down the police, but politely refuses Jesus's offer to become "fishers of men" because "it screws up our tax status if we work off-reserve" (93). When

members of the band council wonder if the authorities will find Jesus, considering the difficulty of finding someone forced to hide in the wilderness, the character Thomas ends the story poignantly: "They found him once. Maybe they'll get lucky and find him again" (93). This is an old argument: according to a Jesuit letter from 1844, Anishinabe chief Oshawana chastised a Jesuit priest, saying, "the Great Spirit sent his son to the white man; but the white man chased him away" (Ruoff 214). These texts present the Biblical tradition as something that finds familiar hospitality within Native cosmologies while being foreign and hostile to colonizers: the problem does not seem to be the Ten Commandments or Jesus in of themselves but the failure of colonizers to take either as seriously as Natives do.

[43] As King's narrator later notes, "Treaties were hardly sacred documents," that "Every Indian on the Reserve knew that," that a treaty promise was "a nice phrase. . .a metaphor"—quite like the title of the novel itself, taken from a kitsch cowboy-and-Indian film in which treaty rights are promised, "As long as the grass is green and the waters run" (*Green Grass* 267)

[44] Furthermore, the tricksters that trouble dualisms demand qualifications "beyond good and evil."

[45] King is certainly not alone in adapting Coyote to play the role of a principle progenitor. In Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Coyote is identified as a cosmic creator who accidentally creates "white man" from his toenail clippings before cursing his carelessness (*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* 135).

[46] Insofar as power within Christian mythology is understood in terms of Foucault's omniscience/omnipotence dyad, Dr. Hovaugh is hardly powerful. This understanding might not sit well with Christian traditions that hinge on such definitions of power in absolutist terms, but the limited omniscience of the Biblical deity as portrayed in *Green Grass Running Water* raises an entirely familiar riddle in Christology: the Christ's humanity seems compromised by possessing omniscience even as his divinity seems compromised by limiting it, and this has certainly been a very long and central subject of Christological debate and conjecture. Dr. Hovaugh complicates definitions of omniscience in Christian mythology, but hardly any more so than Christology has been doing for millennia (see Rieger 96). Besides, the relatively harmless and powerless Dr. Hovaugh comes across as absolutely cuddly when compared to the cruel deity that informs Tinker's and Deloria Jr.'s fierce critiques of colonizing Christianity. King spares Dr. Hovaugh from enjoying any such power. In terms of institutional authority, King even spares Dr. Hovaugh, an American, from being anything as terrifying as a Canadian overseer of (commonly church-run) residential schools: he is not the child rapist, Father Roland Lafleur, of Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, and his "hospital" seems nothing as menacing as an "indoctrination camp" or site for cultural genocide as Jeannette Armstrong has characterized this long-running Canadian pogrom (Scott 127). To put it in cinematic terms, when we witness the clumsy, somewhat clueless Dr. Hovaugh stomping across a parking lot, "oblivious to the rain and to the puddles and ponds. . . spitting as he thundered among the rows of cars" (345), we can imagine him aptly cast as the "straight man" in a comedy routine, much like the "celebrities, experts, and politicians" (Gilroy 134) ensnared in interviews with Ali G were unaware they were being "slyly guided by his wise foolishness" (Gilroy 134), his ability to "move across cultural codes and language games" to demonstrate his "carnivalesque contempt for the pompous and powerful people he was able to ambush, manipulate, and even humiliate" (Gilroy 134). Dr. Hovaugh's similarly indignant and naked seriousness in the face of tricksters serves as a comedic trope or running gag interspersed throughout the novel. For "Jehovah," being associated with episodic comic relief worthy of an Ali G sketch is a very big step up from being associated with the callow, colonizing, tyrant deity that Tinker's theology and Highway's fiction take to task. Despite his determined but failed pursuit of the immortal elders, along with his documented suspicions that the escaped elders' powers defy his sciences, Dr. Hovaugh does not hurt a fly in the novel. As Keller has argued, what post-colonial criticism demands of Christian mythology is an understanding of power (indeed, absolute power) that does not thrive on a simplistic, hierarchical command of discipline that can and has too easily been mimicked by colonizers (Rieger 240; see also Keller, *God and Power*). King's "Jehovah" is in this sense post-colonial

in that his characterization critically and creatively calls for such a re-examination of the relationship between ideas of power in Christian mythology and ideas of power in colonialism.

[47] The colonizer's Christ wants to be a lord but does not realize the title has traditionally accompanied its paradoxically corollary title, "servant." Stripped of this paradox, the term lord suggests simply a kind of hierarchical power, brutally visited on Native peoples in the form of colonization, and for which there is "no analogue in North American indigenous societies for the relationship of power and disparity which is usually signified by the word *lord*" (Tinker 139).

[48] Eli never reveals precisely why he returns to his ancestral home, although we suspect his decision may have triggered by two deaths: his mother's, of which we are given no details, and Karen's, which was a tragic-comic struggle involving years of successfully fighting cancer only to be killed in an instant by a speeding car.

[49] Another Christological paradox Eli evokes here is this: if Young Man Walking On Water wants to lord power over nature, Eli is prepared to be its servant.

[50] Some of these figures remain problematic today for what might be seen as leveraging the exoticism of their ancestry, all from the safety of their whiteness, to gain dubiously earned attention. E. Pauline Johnson would be such a candidate. Johnson actually appears in *Green Grass Running Water* as a tourist named Polly visiting the Dead Dog Café. King's relatively affectionate treatment of "Polly," along with his frequent references to himself as an "apple" on his CBS Radio Show, *The Dead Dog Café*, make me wonder if there a touch of self-satire here.

[51] On the other hand, Eli's death seems absolutely dignified compared to the massive robbing of Native graves in the name of archaeology (Weaver, "Indian Presence With No Indians Present: NAGPRA And Its Discontents" 100).

[52] See "An Act to Amend The Indian Act, 1876; Chapter 34, 21-07" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada).

[53] The novel Eli is reading seems to be have made into a film that other characters in the novel are watching, intersecting their narratives across media.

[54] As Bonhoeffer stated, in a trickster-worthy move of reading Nietzsche sympathetically,

The Christian gospel stands beyond good and evil. Nor could it be otherwise; for, were the grace of God to be subordinated to human criteria of good and evil, this would establish a claim on God incompatible with the uniqueness of God's power and honour. There is a profound significance in the Biblical attribution of the fall to humanity's eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (137)

Where Manicheanism demands unassailable dualism, classical Christology demands paradox—a point that Bonhoeffer, the Bible-meets-bomb adversary of the Nazis, illustrated by enlisting the thought of a figure rabidly appropriated by the Nazis to justify their regime. King plays a similar trick with Christian mythology.

[55] Most histories of Christian encounters with Native traditions cogently argue that the former damages the latter (even when that "damage" in coded as "success" in Christian triumphalist terms). Nevertheless, I remain intrigued by Richard Pointer's argument in *Encounters of the Spirit: Native Americans and European Colonial Religion* that American Christian theology and praxis has been far more deeply shaped by—and therefore remains indebted to—critiques from Native peoples than Manichean, cowboys-vs.-Indians histories of American religion might suggest. In a slightly different vein, I remain equally compelled by Craig S. Womack's critical salvo regarding the compromised hospitality—"Are we missionaries?" asks Womack—which Native studies may be extending to Christian mythology:

Why does a religious studies scholar need to prove that a Christian Indian is still an Indian? Why would he not be? Let me play devil's advocate for just a minute to demonstrate what I mean. . . Could we not, for example, as part of our Native studies analysis, scrutinize [Apess's and Occom's] Christian theology for its own sake without converting it to Indianness? Are we missionaries? Do all Christian Indians have to be converted to Indian Indians before we can include them as worthy studies? Must Christian theology be decoded as a subterfuge for an underlying Indianness? Can tribal sovereignty include an individual's, or a community's, right to choose one's own religion, including Christianity? (88)

I appreciate Weaver's demonstration of Occom's and Apess's communitism. I question, however, the need to supplement their Christianity with recognizable "Native" signs that demonstrates their theology transcends its "Christianness," especially in response to a critic who might claim an opposition between Christian and Native identities.

Reading *Green Grass Running Water's* inclusion and hybridization of Christian and Native imagery reminded me of reading the novels in the *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis, that 20th century literary and intellectual darling of Evangelical Christians whose Christian-themed *Chronicles* have sold more than 100 million copies in 41 languages (D. L. Hughes) . In *The Magician's Nephew*, Aslan, Lewis's Christ/God figure creates Fauns and Satyrs, commands them to "laugh," and calls the "River-god" into his "council" (*The Magician's Nephew* 104–06). In *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Jesus is cast as his fleeting Biblical figurations as a lion and as a military commander, "General Jesus" so to speak, who nevertheless forgives the novel's Judas-figure, Edmond. In *Prince Caspian*, Aslan liberates Narnia with the help of Bacchus, and they *dance* together (*Prince Caspian* 193,197)! Although Lewis has raised the ire of some stringently Biblicist Evangelicals, and King has sometimes been recognized for his Christian tendencies, it's surprising that Lewis's decision to populate his fiction with European pagan figures has hardly eroded his status as a giant of Christian fiction whereas King's similar decision to populate his fiction with Native spiritual figures has positioned him a writer who unravels and tangles Christian thought. They write from different political location to be sure, but can that account for the severity of how differently these writers' treatment of Christian imagery has been received? Both, after all, are widely celebrated writers of fiction. Both are professors of literature and mythology. If Bacchus and Christ can share a dance, I see no reason why Christ and Coyote can't share a joke. Trickster discourses, besides helping exorcise colonial Christianities from ancient Manichean heresies that haunt them, present readers with characters like those in King's novel: Christological tricksters capable of transforming the hyphen that lies between "post" and "colonial"– thickening it into a bridge wide enough to traffic commodious cultural exchange while, paradoxically, sharpening it into a syringe deep enough to inject the hopeful prefix "post" with an acute awareness that "colonialism" is hardly in remission.

[56] In textual terms, in the first Manichean model the supplement of the colonial signifier seeks to supplant the signifier, whereas in the second model the "Christological surplus" generated by the Christ paradox—to once again invoke Reiger's insight—overwhelms Manichean dualisms.

[57] Of course, I am hardly the first the analyze Makak as a type of Christ figure. Most of these analyses, of which Paul Hogan's "Subaltern Myths Drawn from the Colonizer: *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and the Revolutionary Jesus" (Hogan, *Empire and Poetic Voice*) is the most comprehensive, attempt to untangle the paradoxical roles that Christian myth and praxis have played in the history, political vocabulary, and storytelling structures in the Caribbean. Hogan's analysis of Makak, as a Christ figure, very much resembles the type of narrative and character analysis presented by Ziolowski in *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus.* As deeply valuable as these Hogan/Ziolowski-style analyses are, they rarely explore the possible consequences of the Christ paradox—as an existential and ontological issue concerning personhood and identity—when grafting theological narratives and theological categories of analysis onto *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. I gingerly reference these previous studies which critically remind us, as Colson put it, that "Makak has parallels throughout the play, but not because this is a silly

little attempt of Walcott to plug into some of the power the Christ myth. Rather," in Makak, "we will have had an imaginative contact with damnation and salvation" (136).

[58] Luther was not above using trickster fables to satirize his opponents as well (Dost 85).

[59] Furthermore, Makak *never* refers to himself as a lion after the opening scene in Part Two.

[60] Selassie's Ethiopian Orthodox tradition highly values the Hebrew Bible, and Selassie likely adopted the Christological title "Lion of Judah" to emphasize his regal lineage to King David without attempting to conflate his identity with Jesus the Christ. The protestant traditions from which Garvey and Rastafarian thought emerged, however, more "literally" interpreted certain messianic underpinnings of Selassie's title.

[61] These American movements themselves drew heavily from Caribbean-born writers Garvey and Frantz Fanon. American Black Power leader Stokely Carmicheal was born in Trinidad. Malcom X's mother was Grenadian. The circuit of political influence returns to the Caribbean through the cultural influence the United States exerts over the Americas, and through Caribbean intellectuals George Padmore and C.L.R. James who spent years in the United States and linked civil rights struggles there with Caribbean anti-colonial struggles (see Nelson 54). Of course, Caribbean reception to Black Power movements was hardly always warm (Bennet), as was the case even within the United States among those fighting for civil equality.

[62] Indeed, after *Dream*, Walcott wrote two plays, *In A Fine Castle* to deal with the 1970 "Black Power riots" in Trinidad, and *O Babylon* to deal with Selassie's 1966 visit to Jamaica. Neither play, however, has been produced as frequently as or received the critical attention that *Dream* has.

[63] Howell even records a vision in which he "can see all the Kings of the earth surrendering their crowns" to Selassie (5).

[64] The psalm calls for harps and trumpets to join the seas roaring, mountains singing, and rivers clapping their hands in thanks for a king's victory.

[65] Unlike other central characters, Lestrade may not have an explicit animal name revealing hints about his relationship with Makak, but early 19th century heraldry for the Lestrade family does prominently feature a sole lion (Baptiste et al. 1). And insofar as Lestrade alludes to Arthur Conan Doyle's pedantic Inspector Lestrade, Walcott's Lestrade evokes a body of colonial literature in which racist monkey and lion imagery were so commonplace they help contextualize Lestrade's affectations by and affections for lion-like, colonial power.

[66] Robert Beckford's excellent study on dub and theology, *Jesusdub: Theology, Music, and Social Change* draws on Gates's study of the Signifying Monkey as a core feature of its analysis of tricksterism in Caribbean music and theology (74). Beckford takes this African diasporic connection as one needing minimal explication or ethnographic verification, which is not a criticism of an absence in Beckford's work but a testament to how these connections are, within certain studies in the area, hardly considered contentious.

[67] The following example from Levine of a monkey-lion toast should prove illustrative:

> Deep down in the jungle so they say
> There's a signifying motherfucker down the way.
> There hadn't been no disturbin' in the jungle for quite a bit,
> For up jumped the monkey in the tree one day and laughed,
> "I guess I'll start some shit."

He sets Lion against Elephant by reporting a fictional conversation:

He said, "Mr. Lion," he said, "A bad-assed motherfucker down your way."
He said, "Yeah! The way he talk about your folks is a certain shame.
I even heard him curse when he mentioned your grandmother's name." (378)

[68] Gates coins "signifyin(g)" to deploy the term simultaneously as it would be used in African American vernacular and broader critical theory (both highly coded dialects in their own right). Because Gates argues that "signifyin(g)" in African American literature involves speaking in a double voice, his use of a double voice every time he writes "signifyin(g)" is itself an act of "signifyin(g)." Gates, therefore, enacts the argument he unfolds.

[69] Because Makak the trickster monkey is "signifying," audiences must remain wary or attentive to being the object of mockery or duplicity that conventionally accompanies these significations. Makak denies the audience determinacy, shakes the audience into an awareness of their role as interpreters, and in doing so partly achieves the effect of "alienating" an audience in the vein of Bertolt Brecht (a German playwright who had stirred Walcott and whose techniques Walcott had tried to incorporate into earlier plays).

[70] In terms of names, Moustique's connection to a monkey can seem as curiously camouflaged as Lestrade's connection the heraldic lion imagery ingrained his name's DNA. The connection, however, is fascinating. Our word for mosquito comes from the Latin word "*musca*," which comes from the Sanskrit word "*makak*," whose connotations include a "free undirected motion" of the breath (Byrne 132). Somewhat similarly, the only references to monkeys in the Bible (1 Kings 10:22; 2 Chr. 9:21)—both the Hebrew "koph" and the Greek "kepos"—have their origins "in the Indian Tamil name of the monkey, *kapi*, i.e., swift, nimble, active" (Easton 51).

[71] One suspects that one Latin translation of perichoresis—*circumincession,* "to move around in" (Bermejo 741–42), which could connote the intimacy of dancing— also has its role in the commingling of these terms and ideas.

[72] James Gifford Jr. notes that "dance" is not "etymologically correct in that perichoresis should be spelled with an omega (*chora*) which would suggest "making room or space," "mutual containing," or "coinhering"; whereas it is the incorrect omicron (*chori*) that suggests dancing "as in the Greek chorus" (Gifford 16). Gifford, nevertheless, recognizes the value of the dance metaphor and the currency this metaphor enjoys among some Christologists such as Robert Sherman and Fiddes (Gifford 16). Christoper Hall incorrectly state that perichoresis is etymologically related to "choreography" (*perichoreuo*) before usefully explaining how the "divine persons flow in and out of one another like participants in an intricate dance" (Hall). Karen Baker-Fletcher's description of perichoresis —"a type of sacred dance, within God's own nature" (45)—concurs that

The three hypostases of God indwell one another in one divine nature, the Greek perichoresis, "to dance around," or as it is often translated, "indwelling" or "to envelope." The three hypostases dynamically, relationally dance around and within one another. Each dynamically and interrelationally participates in the one work of divine love, creative, justice, and righteousness through distinctive actions. (56)

[73] Min, too, envisions an earthly, eschatological community premised on the perichoresis of its creator:

The creation of the material universe, the cosmic body of Christ, the redemption of humanity as the wounded and suffering body of Christ, the recreation of both history and nature as participation in the risen body—all these are rooted in the eternal solidarity or perichoresis of the immanent Trinity. (149)

[74] Makak's perichoresis, in which personhood is a social locus, also begins overcoming Hogan's critique of the play's "social constitution of personal identity" for defining "personal identity *as* social identity" ("Mimeticism, Reactionary Nativism, and the Possibility of Post-colonial Identity in Derek Walcott's 'Dream on Monkey Mountain'" 106)—perhaps especially so in post-colonial settings where social identities are circumscribed by scarcity and antagonism. The paradoxical unity-in-difference of perichoretic communion suggests that blurring social and personal identities need not suggest the former

flattening the complexity of the latter. More applied studies regarding how perichoresis can serve as applied models for psychoanalysis (Keller, "Engimatic Experiences: Spirit, Complexity and Person" 142; see also Cooper) and economic development (Leshem 70; WaribokoK 211) also demonstrate the currency of the perichoretic metaphor.

[75] Given the prominence of Carnival studies within post-colonial Caribbean theologies (Andersen; Fischer; O. A. W. Thomas), Walcott is hardly alone is recognizing the post-colonial potential in Carnival's celebration of social inversions, trickster figures, and paradoxical consecration of the ribald. The trend in carnival apologetics seems, principally, to valorize Carnival by harmonizing its quintessence with Christian thought, and to draw on the lively syncretism of carnival as an inspiration of post-colonial Caribbean theologies. To these ends, carnival apologetics present a formidable body of arguments to tackle Clodovis Boff's critique that "carnival is not about the meeting of the wolf and the sheep in a free, [genial] discourse. It is about the freedom of the sheep to speak in systems that pretend the sheep and wolf are equal" (Haers and Mey 813). "Pretending," for carnival's apologists, as my discussion will demonstrate, need not connote passivity born of powerlessness. In a carnival context, pretending reduces colonial pretensions to objects of play. Pretending envisions possibilities of personhood that thrive by defying colonial strictures. And pretending dares to dream, despite the ceaseless, sleepless menace of imperial brutality. In the main, the growing body of carnival apologetics successfully challenges readers to value a festival whose cultural and theological significance some risk dismissing as empty pageantry. "The Christian conception of the reign or Kingdom of God, like the Carnival," notes Andy Kingston-Smith, "presents a profound challenge to the present fallen order of society, both in the prophetic, scriptural tradition…and by the incarnational revelation of the life and teachings of Jesus" (Kingston-Smith 4). Writing within the conventions of carnival apologetics, Kingston-Smith's equating carnival with the Kingdom of God extends carnival's significance by abstracting what it signifies: "carnival" references more than a specific rite; it references the broader cultural kinetics embodied in carnival's ethos of personhood.

[76] Although Walcott's admitted regard for Kabuki and its applications in Caribbean theatre may have affected his particular stagings of the play, Walcott provides few directorial instructions that would consciously necessitate exploring this possibility.

[77] As J.H. Johnson summarizes:

Both were divine though born of mortals. Both died violently and returned to life, a resurrection that promised believers everlasting life. Both descended to the underworld to redeem departed souls. To the followers of both, wine was an initiation and a sacrament. Cannibalism figured in both divine narratives, with the Titans' brutal meal and words of Jesus at the Last Supper. And every spring brought the celebration of rebirth, in Easter and in the Dionysian festivals. (J. H. Johnson 60)

[78] Christian liturgies were also hardly immune to influences of classical dramaturgy, as demonstrated in Christine Catharina Schusenberg's study, *The Relationship Between the Church and Theatre: Exemplified in the Writings of the Church Fathers* (1988).

[79] Indeed, the Cappadocian "victory" is well attested by the number of contemporary texts that casually posit "persona" as the Latin translation for "*prosopon*," reproducing the Cappadocian argument while effacing debates regarding etymological derivations or the theological tensions generated by diverse, diachronic deployments of these terms.

[80] Elaine Savory invokes this metaphor in her Caribbean linguistic contextualization of the play's opening: "The role of music and dance in Walcott's plays . . . reflects the centrality of interconnected languages within Caribbean culture" (244).

[81] Unlike Moustique and Lestrade, who enjoy lengthy and critical exchanges with Basil, Makak only "shakes his head" silently (314-316) responding to a few of Basil's questions late in the play, and the

audience is told at the end of the play that Makak had initially been arrested, off stage, in part for harassing Basil.

[82] Uhrbach neatly details some of these semblances, the most significant being "a Basilean is a royalist, and basilica means kingly or royal" (578-579). Like Makak, Basil's identity seems to mask his regality. Whether Makak and Basil are figurations of the same "king," or competitors for the title, depends on the particular narrative threads expositors and directors pull in attempting to untangle these characters' tangled relationship.

[83] Although this first scene opens with the fantastical cross-fading into the realist, it remains riddled with enough fantastical moments—mostly traces and echoes of the prologue's astral dance—to make the scene subtly dreamlike. For example, the chorus continues to make frequent interventions in the scene, attenuating the scene's realism. When Tigre sings softly to himself, the chorus joins him (218); when Souris makes chant-like calls for Makak to be punished, the chorus echoes his chant (222); when Makak is on trial, the chorus mocks him (223).

[84] Intelligible, of course, is a far cry from "intelligent."

[85] These characters' identities are positioned like parallel mirrors, each uniquely contoured, each refracting the image it projects into the mirror it faces, neither mirror alone able to generate the image it projects/refracts without refracting/projecting a reciprocal image in its parallel other.

[86] In fact, Makak only begins speaking at the beginning of the play after the stage is flooded with moonlight (219), an early signal of some connection between the moon and Makak's speech.

[87] If we were witnessing the events staged as a flashback, the scene would end with events leading to Makak's arrest, which it does not.

[88] Èsù-Elégbára has also commonly been trasnslated as "Èsù Elegba." I have used both translations, depending on the scholarly source to which I am referreing, and to provide a modest demonstration of the maliability of the trickster's name itself.

[89] Parallels between Moustique, as "Sancho Panza," usurping the role a character more central than Don Quixote evokes Frantz Kafka's short story, "The Truth About Sancho Panza" in which identities between Panza and Quixote blur as do those between Moustique and Makak.

[90] Makak relies on no herbs as he attempts his healing—a contradiction which Moustique, the double-talking trickster, quickly highlights to prove Makak's transcendent, post-colonial power. Makak's succeeds where "white doctor," "bush medicine," "White prayers, and "black prayers" have failed (252). And, just like that, the once-mourning/now-dancing crowd, enamoured with the Makak's post-colonial power, ignores aspersions cast on their anti-colonial cultural heritage.

[91] In Chapter 6 of this dissertation, I explore in more detail the growth of post-colonial Pentecostal and charismatic traditions along with their Christological and trickster significance.

[92] W.E.B. Dubois described the role of slave shaman (in an American context) as one who "found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing and disappointment of a stolen and oppressed people" (Du Bois). One American slave owner in 1815 noted that such figures typically commanded "great sway over the minds and opinions of the rest" by claiming "he has seen sundry miraculous visions, *equal to those of John on the Isle of Patmos*" (J. W. Roberts 65, emphasis mine).

[93] Even if Moustique is still holding on to his spear here, the spear would only be as ironic sign of its uselessness. If you can't use your spear to squish a small spider, either it's not much a spear or you're not much a warrior.

⁹⁴ Although no stage directions are given indicating this, his opening lines seem to be asking questions that indicate he is addressing the audience: "Did you feel pity for me or horror for them?" (286)

⁹⁵ The play hints that Makak might be able to see Basil. When Makak says, "He is talking to nothing" we should not assume that means *nobody*: Basil earlier claims, "I want nothing, pardner. An I go get it" (270). This reading depends on how one interprets the play's paradoxical uses of the word "nothing"— which is a lengthy and complex exploration best saved for another paper.

⁹⁶ Insofar as Lestrade's erratic speech and actions during such moments mimics Makak's, they do so much like Lestrade's unintended caricature of jurisprudence had mimicked rituals of adjudication. That is, once again, with the air of a menacing clown.

⁹⁷ In 1960, Walcott dismissed the work of Ginsberg's circle of artists as "preponderant junk," a "dated" rehash of Dadaist absurdism and a "commendable discomfort at the direction of Western civilization, which to these writers will not be satisfied until it has blown itself up" ("Other Lands" 383) In this early piece on Ginsberg, Walcott made clear his preference for Blake ("Other Lands" 382). However, when Walcott wrote *Dream* ten years later the absurdist nihilism that he had once found worthy of easy "caricature and imitation" ("Other Lands" 383) became a signature vehicle through which the play explored a dream that seems like it will not be satisfied until it, too, has blown itself up. By 1992, Walcott acknowledged the significant growth of his respect for Ginsberg. Indeed, Walcott referenced the vivacity of Ginsberg's work to *criticize* late twentieth century American poetry:

> In poems like 'Kaddish' and 'Howl,' you can hear a cantor between the lines. It's fully alive, and I think that's what's missing in modern poetry. It's too dry and cerebral.

⁹⁸ For example, Lestrade is likely alluding to *The White Goddess*, a speculative novel by Robert Graves who was a fan of Walcott (Breslin 132). Lestrade omits Graves's description of the titular figuration as "the female spider…whose embrace is death" (Graves 15)—which would suggest an even closer bond between Graves's and Walcott's works—while also omitting Graves's need to describe "The White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living" (the last title evoking *theotokos*) as, paradoxically, "the black screaming hag Sycorax, 'Pig Raven', the mother of Caliban the ugliest man alive" (Graves 183). Once again, the last title, in positioning Makak who has frequently referred to himself as "ugly," pairs the child of the "All Living" with the child of the "ugliest man alive," implying Makak is the Christ-like issue of a *theotokos* in a Christologically-styled paradox amped with the potential to overwhelm imaginations imprisoned in Manichean hegemonies. Graves's text has received due criticism for reifying racist metaphors of whiteness and blackness (Hoch 97–100), which makes plunging into the paradox of this invocation an expository challenge for another discussion.

⁹⁹ Lestrade's motives may be manifold—violence for its own sake, the pleasure of controlling Makak, a belief that killing this moon goddess, so closely associated with The Baron, will free him from Basil's control—but they are not particularly relevant to my reading.

¹⁰⁰ As K.B. Josephs helpfully summarizes, this beheading has received significant critical attention in scholarship searching for meaning in Makak's violence (Josephs 15).

¹⁰¹ Robert Fox attempts to unravel what, when "Makak is clearly posited as a kind of Christ-figure," we are to make of the "pagan white goddess" ("Missions and Empire, c. 1873-1914" 565). Fox argues that the two may share an identity through some form of theophany, and invokes the Holy Spirit as feminine, to characterize the apparition. Fox, then, discovers but does not develop the potential of Christological thought when engaging Makak.

[102] To whom "brethren" refers has been debated, but the 4th-century exegesis advanced by John Chrysostom still has currency in Christian praxis:

They are your brethren; and how do you call them least? Why, for this reason they are brethren: because they are lowly, because they are poor, because they are out-cast. For such does he most invite to brotherhood, the unknown, the contemptible… (Homily 79 on the Gospel of Matthew in Severson 65)

[103] Francis of Assisi believed he had *literally* encountered Jesus in the person of a leper.

[104] I reference Hopkins's poem more generously than Kearney does (and I accredit the poem to Hopkins, which Kearney does not).

[105] In his novel *Fifth Business*, Robertson Davies includes an extended dialogue outlining Fifth Business as a character who is technically minor, in terms of the volume of dialogue and action relative to other characters. Despite this relative paucity of dialogue and action, the character who plays Fifth Business is nevertheless crucial. As Davies elaborates,

> you cannot make a plot without . . . Fifth Business, because he is the odd man out . . . And you must have Fifth Business because he is the one who knows the secret of the hero's birth, or comes to the assistance of the heroine when she thinks all is lost . . . The prima donna and the tenor, the contralto and the basso, get all the best music and do all the spectacular things, but you cannot manage a plot without Fifth Business! (Davies 214)

[106] Lestrade, the advocate of law, now stands beside Makak like Moses, the giver of the law; Moustique, who spoke truth to power, now stands besides Makak like Elijah, the prophet who spoke up to Ahab.

[107] The paradoxical inversions of "big" and "small" in the parables and miracles included in the Gospels are one illustrative example of the paradoxes and inversions associated with what "big" and "small" can connote (see Matthew 13:31-35, 14:13-21; 16:6; Mark 4:30-34; Luke 21:1-4; John 6:1-14).

[108] Ironically, as Andrew Porter notes, even mission initiatives aimed at outcastes and pariahs was done "wielding 'the grand lever' for the Christian transformation of Hindu society" ("Missions and Empire, c. 1873-1914" 565).

[109] In the spirit of trickster irony, it's worth distinguishing the accomplishments of the Tata family, who by 2011 became the single largest employers of *British* manufacturers, rescuing international British brands Jaguar, Rolls Royce and Tetley Tea from insolvency (Hutton).

[110] Accusations of "no Christian piety" were mild relative to Burke's comparison of Hastings to "tigers, vultures, and even a vampire" (Rudd 50).

[111] Beneath their diplomatic and ecumenical veneer, Arnold's correspondences with or about India-bound missionaries reveal ambiguities, regarding attempted alignments of Christianity with India's colonization, that still register in God of Small Things. Arnold's faint praise for missionaries was strained with acerbic reservations: characterizing a young India-bound missionary as "high-souled and imaginative, though somewhat indolent" (11); noting how missionaries' competing denominational claims to "so-called Apostolical [sic] Succession" (362) were blurred by the indistinguishable fanaticism of the claimants; questioning missionary laxity to "purify Christian Churches of whites and half-castes" (362) that were unwelcoming to Indian converts; affirming missionizing "is a Christian and a most important calling" (88) while insisting on domestic want—"is not the mass of evil here, greater a thousand times in its injurious effects on the world at large, than all of idolatry of India?" (362)—and foregrounding the

positive religious impact of an Evangelical colleague's missionizing efforts on that very colleague, not on those he tried to convert, noting with happy surprise that the "narrowness of mind and peculiarity of manner which belong to that party" had been "swept away" by missionary life (397). Arnold's correspondences bespeak the ironies of a period in which the bigoted zeal marking late 19th-century portraits of Hindus by William Ward, in *Hindoos*, would by 1847 seem quaint compared to the bigoted zeal marking Popery in the Colonies, J.H. Jackson's diatribe against English Roman Catholic missionaries in India. Otherwise put, this was a period during which the Company's policy of explicitly distancing itself from Christianizing missions was eclipsed by Christianizing missions explicitly distancing themselves from each other (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 117–19, 124–25; Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire" 230; Strong 126; see also Howitt 230). Curiously, "high-souled," "imaginative," yet "indolent" (Howitt 265) were popular 19th-century characterizations of India itself, and I suspect Arnold may have been aware of this irony in lieu of his other concerns regarding missionizing India.

[112] Such arguments, notwithstanding their significant (and ironic?) provenance in Carey's *own* writings and practice provided grist for evangelicals' accusations that mission schools preferred hiring agnostics over practicing Christians (see also Metcalf 48–49).

[113] Given the messiness of the missionary scene, it is not surprising prominent Christian leaders disaffiliated their faith from "missionary paternalism" (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 115), or that "Christian missions often attracted their greatest followings where their connection to imperial authority was least in evidence" (Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and The Raj" 107). Jogendra Nath Bhattacharya, prominent Hindu critic of imperial missionizing, contended "Christianity is a religion of trickery" (in Bayly 163–64), perhaps unaware how nettling this trickery could be for its indigenous practitioners.

[114] That the Keralite St. George was recognized as the brother of Bhadrakali (Dempsey 49), herself a pendant of pan-Indian devotion to Kali, demonstrates how deftly devotees of St. George could entreat and remix local poetics of deified kinship.

[115] See W.A Wigram (viii) for a further historical contexts regarding the politics of denomination in the Thomasine Christians' Eastern Christian affiliations.

[116] Even cogent attempts to distil points of unity amidst the heterogeneity of Indian Christians, particularly Thomasines, beget fresh contentions: when Frykenberg identifies caste not Christ as the shared preoccupation uniting Indian Christianity while dividing Indian Christians—"Roman Catholic or evangelical, Anglican or Nonconformist (Dissenter), Mar Thoma (Syrian) or Nazarani, Jakoba or Nestorian, Brahman or Vallalar or Nardar, conservative or liberal" ("Christian Missions and The Raj" 128)—he assumes caste is not a significant site for Christological contention. In *God of Small Things*, however, caste constructs and hybridized-if-inchoate invocations Christological are intimate correlates, fettering perfunctory post-colonial renunciations of colonial legacies.

[117] For an extended discussion on "vocation" (or "calling") as a dynamic of salvific theosis consider Bruce Ellis Benson's *Liturgy as a Way of Life* (22, 96, 115, 126).

[118] My mother, who is Indian, describes my wedding as "small"; my mother-in-law, who is Hungarian, describes the same wedding as "big." Both are perfectly correct, given their respective cultural loci.

[119] As MacKendrick further clarifies,

The "I am" as it begins could almost be a straightforward statement of presence, but then it explicitly turn back upon itself. In thus circling, it renders strange, as it were so purely pointing (its name is nothing but its self) that we who are not it have no idea where *we* would point if we wanted to speak of it. (88–89) (One wonders if God seems so circumspect when sharing his name with Moses because God is infinitely self-consciousness).

[120] Perhaps more significantly, the narrator's metaphor collapses distinct deictic axes—space and time—into a continuum, helping facilitate the novel's frequent jumps between chronological timelines.

[121] Once again, I hope you will indulge the multiple deictic connotations attending my use of "how," which on its own suggest "the way in which" but can also measure volume as in "how much?"

[122] The right not to be addressed principally by caste designation is the same right enjoyed by high-caste workers.

[123] I realize that my conjugation of "to assume" in the present imperfect tense, despite not being technically incorrect, does not neatly align with the broader tense of the sentence. I have used the present imperfect to accent the *process* of the narrative persona's theosis.

[124] The final clause of the previous sentence repeats, verbatim, how Estha's sight of already-bloodied Velutha would be described near the novel's end.

[125] Sexuality as a metaphor for or mode of spirituality enjoys considerably more prominence in Hindu traditions than in Christian ones. Considering the multiple sacred mythologies *God of Small Things* blends, bespeaking its post-colonial cosmopolitanism, readings that posit Velutha as a symbol for Krishna can be compelling and valuable (Rofail 208). Such readings demonstrate the complexity of the text, reminding readers that the Roy's novel demands ever-broadening our hermeneutic horizons. If I harbor any inkling wariness towards such readings, this wariness emerges from these readings' inclination to "close off" Velutha, to risk consigning him to an identity like entomologists consigning moths. Besides, sacralized eroticism is hardly unprecedented in Christian thought, particularly in theorizations of theosis: Norman Russell's recent characterization of theosis as "the erotic call of God" (Russell 318) echoes Maximus the Confessor's 6th-century description of "theosis as an 'erotic union'" (in Armstrong 298; Clendenin 374; see also R. Hughes 380). Just to be clear, my analysis needs neither to contest interpreting Velutha as a figuration of Krishna nor to venture a robust, alternative theorization of the sacred erotic in *God of Small Things*. More modestly, my analysis continues to profile how the final invocation of the "blue church sky," having accrued connotations that now include consociation with consummated eroticism, counsels the continuing hypostatic transfiguration of the narrator's diegesis. Otherwise put, my analysis resists consigning Velutha to a singular identity and seeks, instead, to recognize how the Christological poetics included in Velutha's construction out-trick such consignment.

[126] Beyond visual deictics, the passage aligns itself with Velutha's deixis using auditory clues: Velutha "heard his own voice beat back at him" and "heard himself say something which made no difference to the man he spoke to" (271).

[127] By the way, the narrator never reveals the official entomological title for Pappachi's moth. Pappachi's moth remains Pappachi's moth. Small mercies.

[128] The grammatical ambiguity as to whom or what the deictic "them" refers—the Macaulayist or colonial codes—is intentional. Considering the nature of my dissertation, and the specific arguments explored in this chapter, I hope you will indulge this benign blurring.

[129] "Liberation," as a term, is hardly uncommon in studies of African theologies, but these studies tend to concentrate heavily on defining or debating what "liberation" means in African theological contexts, rather than advancing or contributing confidently to broad, self-conscious movement (see Nyamiti 65–66; Martey 63; J. S. Ukpong 521–29; Moloney 513). Sadly, and surprisingly, these debates remain largely out of the purview of my literary exposition of *The Fishermen*. For example, Gabriel Setiloane's "theology of the cross" aligns well with classical liberationist emphases "on God's preferential for the poor" (Amoah and Oduyoye 41) but this vein of Christological thought is neither presented as the reigning Christology Obioma's critiques, nor is it presented (let alone advanced) as a Christological alternative available within the novel's zeitgeist.

[130] This God of Providence, however, rarely demands significant criticism of the institutional regimes—corporate, political, ecclesiastical, etc.—through which the disenfranchised should seek empowerment, seek liberation from their hardship.

[131] My earlier chapter on Walcott's "The Dream on Monkey Mountain" discussed the use of lion, lamb, monkey and mosquito imagery in Walcott's fableization of this conqueror-conquered paradox. Although some axes of analysis in this chapter intersect with my earlier discussion, Obioma's treatment of this Christological paradox differs significantly from Walcott's in terms of its post-colonial context, assumed Christological signifiers, integration of trickster signification, and key targets of criticism.

[132] Otherwise put, whereas North-Atlantic debates about the *Christus Victor* tend to focus on the ontological mechanisms of atonement, African engagements with the *Christus Victor* tend to focus on broadening soteriological goals and realizing salvific power experientially.

[133] Benjamin uses "I remember" five times in the novel (3, 11, 27, 66, 125); he uses "I remembered" ten times in the novel (168, 171, 211, 222, 242, 250, 287, 293).

[134] To clarify, Benjamin's knowledge about Abulu is not suspect *simply* because it arrives through traditions and networks of oral communication. Colonial assaults on the value of African orature have met with robust post-colonial defenses of African theological orature (Maxey). After all, much Christian tradition depends on recognizing the reliability of the oral networks through which the early gospel narratives were circulated before being compiled, transcribed, and canonized. Ben's portrait of Abulu, however, reveals tensions between knowledge of Abulu gained through his direct witness of or engagement with Abulu and knowledge gained through his various oral networks. *The Fishermen* by no means universally devalues the knowledge Nigerian children can access and negotiate through various oral networks—indeed, much of the narrative depends on this access and negotiation—but neither does the novel romanticize the knowledge gleaned from these networks as transcending scrutiny. For example, even Ben questions Obembe's awareness of supposedly common oral knowledge (244).

[135] The amorphously bracketed era of New Imperialism is sometimes referred to as the "high imperial period" (Cox, *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700* 187).

[136] The Irish Home Rule League was founded in 1873; the Indian National Congress, in 1885.

[137] Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*—which commands nearly Biblical authority for Obembe and Benjamin—evocatively chronicles this shift in missionary sensibilities: Achebe's Mr. Brown, a layman and the first missionary to the (fictional) Umuofia community, is replaced later by the Reverend James Smith. Whereas Mr. Brown befriends the community's outcastes, accepts cursed land, and is benignly tolerated

as a ritually unclean, the Reverend James Smith is imperial agent in league with "New Imperialist" designs.

[138] Dreams and visionary experiences can, of course, also be found in the New Testament (consider, for starters, Matthew 1:20, 2:12, 2:13, 2:22; 27:19; Acts 1:10, 5:19, 7:56, 8:26, 9:3-6, 10:3, 12:7 18:9-10, 16:9, 18:9-10, 23:11, 27:23). What counter-missionary Biblical hermeneutics stressed was the continuity between Hebrew Bible and the New Testament regarding the revelatory authority of dreams.

[139] Select examples of fraternal strife in Biblical narratives include the following: Isaac steals Esau's blessing (Genesis 27-29); Joseph's brothers sell him into slavery (Genesis 37-18-36; David is chosen over his older and more conventionally promising brothers to succeed Saul (1 Samuel 16:11); and the prodigal son's older brother remains too self-righteously embittered to forgive his once-wayward sibling (Luke 28-30).
[140] The novel leaves unresolved whether these bodies were desecrated by criminals hoping the trappings of a violent fetish rite mask their crime, or by actual believers who conducted these rites, or both.

[142] When Benjamin's father makes his son repeat their vows to be fishers of higher education, he does so explicitly in English (36). Somewhat similarly, Trevor Noah, recalling his South African childhood, shares how his grandmother would proudly ask him to pray in English when she hosting Bible studies because she still suspected that prayers in English carried more clout (Noah).
[143] Without dismissing the storied history of African struggles to exercise native agency over institutionalized education, Benjamin and his father share sentiments towards Western education evincing a long pedigree of internalized racism. Across time and geography, their sentiments echo the indigenous resistance met by missionary William Ashton's 1851 attempts to cultivate native agency in southern African education.

> In 1849 Ashton began to train African teachers. In 1851, when seven had gone out amongst their own people, the cry was raised against them, "We won't have a black teacher like ourselves: we will have a white teacher who will guide and protect us." (Haile 6)

Also: having lived in Toronto most of my life, the recognizable ironies in Benjamin's dream deserve mention. Had Benjamin and his brother made it to Toronto, they would have likely attended schools heavily populated with children that looked like me or like them—that is, not white people. I have studied with white people: the experience is not without its charms. But "sliver of paradise" may be a stretch.

[144] Charles Nyamiti's Christ as "Ancestor" and E.B. Udoh's "Guest" Christology are prominent examples of these attempted Trans-African or Pan-African Christologies.

[145] I outline why Docetic Christology strays from classical Christological traditions in Chapter 1 of this dissertation (page 26).

[146] The losers of the "hot debate" (228) regarding Abulu's attendance were those "who felt the house of God was meant for anyone who wished to come in, naked/clothed, poor/rich, sane/insane and to whom identity was of no importance" (228).
[147] Consider further contextualization of Èsù-Elegbain my earlier chapter on Walcott's "The Dream on Monkey Mountain."

[148] I expand on these Christ/ Èsù connections at length in my earlier chapter on Walcott's play, "The Dream on Monkey Mountain."

[149] Christian tradition has long paired the Christ with light imagery, and it's common for English-language petitions entreating God's keep to pair "guide us" and "protect us," but Benjamin's allusion also references Biblical images of the Christ "our forerunner" (Hebrews 6:20) and our door opener (significantly, as one of the first *Christus Victor* images in Revelation, verses 3:7-8).

[150] After exiting the school, Ikenna guides his brothers to a crowded rally for "Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the presidential aspirant of the Social Democratic Party" (68). From within the "congested mass of humanity" (68), Ikenna leads his brothers in a hymn he and his brothers "had hijacked, remixed and constantly sang for Mother" to appease her anger:
We'd put "Mama" in place of "God." But now, Ikenna replaced "Mama" with "M.K.O."
 . . .
M.K.O., you are beautiful beyond description.
Too marvelous for words
. . .
Who can touch your infinite wisdom?
Who can fathom the depths of your love?
M.K.O., you are beautiful beyond description.
Your majesty is enthroned above. (69-70)
Ikenna's spontaneous lyrical trick of replacing "God" with "M.K.O."—via "Mama"—speaks to how easily venerating divinity and venerating earthly authority can be interchanged in a political economy where "religion, like ethnicity, serves as an instrument for the acquisition of state power" (Obianyo 141). M.K.O., delighted when he hears the boys' song, invites the brothers to join him on his podium, grants them scholarships, and pads the reputation of the boys' school by lending it a loose affiliation with "a man almost everyone in the west of Nigeria believed would be Nigeria's next president" (Obioma, *The Firshermen* 74).

[151] Ikenna and Boja, in a macabre send-up of well-intentioned, missionary-sanctioned violence, had killed Yoyodon "on a compassionate quest to free the fish from its 'dirty water'"– replacing Yoyodon's water with "clean drinking water" only to discover "the fish could no longer rise from among the row of glistening pebbles and corals" (11); a death by baptism, for a fish.

[152] *The Fishermen*'s fresh enculturation of the Christ myth, of course, culminates in Obioma's use of trickster tropes to revive Christological paradoxes necessary to the novel's narrative mediation on theodicy. *The Fishermen* in some ways represents a literary continuation of Idowu's enculturation of Èsùinto Christian mythology in order to probe sublimated paradoxes within colonial and post-colonial schematizations of Christian power.

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